

AGATON SAX

AND LISPINGTON'S
GRANDFATHER CLOCK

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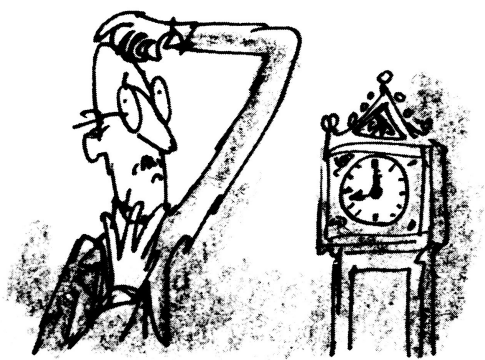


Agaton Sax
and
Lispington's Grandfather Clock

Written by Nils-Olof Franzén

Illustrated by Quentin Blake

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1 A Double Attack

No one, not even his worst enemy (and he had many enemies), could accuse Inspector Lippington of being an extravagant man. On the contrary, he was careful to the point of meanness with both his own and Scotland Yard's money. So when, on the particular summer's morning that this story begins, he suddenly hurled himself at the telephone on the desk of his office at Scotland Yard and, with feverish fingers, dialled Agaton Sax's number in Byköping, there could be no doubt that he had something extremely important and urgent to tell his Swedish friend and colleague.

There was a few moments' silence, during which Lippington drummed his fingers impatiently on his desk, and then he heard a sharp voice at the other end of the line.

'Is that you?' he panted.

'Of course not,' came the reply.

'Of course not? Who are you, then?' asked Lippington, by now thoroughly irritated.

'Who are you, I wonder?' retorted the other voice — sharper still this time.

'Well . . . I . . . ahem . . . it's rather awkward . . . I'm . . . er, top secret, if you see what I mean,' said Lippington, finishing his sentence in a rush and still drumming on his desk with two fingers.

'Top secret? I see.' A shrill note had crept into the other voice. 'Are you trying to frighten me? Listen, I'll tell you something. Do you think I'm not hardened? Haven't I dealt for years with innumerable crooks, not to mention that dreadful man, Lippington, over and over again? Haven't I got used to putting up with his habit of popping up all over the place when he's least expected? And you think you can frighten *me* just by saying you're top secret? What do you want?'

By now to his horror, Lippington had recognized the voice as that of Agaton Sax's Aunt Matilda, a lady who he knew to his cost would stop at nothing when roused. Steeling himself to cope with this unforeseen calamity, he struck a note of brazen flippancy:

'Well, I'm sure *you* know best who *you* are, and I'm Robin Hood's brother-in-law. Now, would you please put me through to your nephew, Mr Sax?'

'Of all the cheek! You're that man Lippington again! I feel it in my bones. As soon as I heard the telephone ring I said to myself: that's a nasty sounding ring—it must be Mr Lippington of Scotland Yard. I'm warning you, if you go on . . . Yes, what is it?'

Aunt Matilda's voice suddenly disappeared, and Lippington's face brightened considerably, like a summer sky when the threatening rain clouds suddenly dissolve.

'Splendid,' he said, mentally rubbing his hands together cheerfully. 'That's much better! Hello, Agaton, are you there by any chance?'

'I'm here all right, Lippington.' Agaton Sax spoke in his usual firm, decisive tone. 'Glad to hear from you again—sorry about the delay, but I had just spotted a helicopter circling over our little town and went to have a look. I thought at first there was something fishy about it, but I suppose it's only advertising our Children's Day, which is next Sunday. Now, to what do I owe the great pleasure of hearing your voice again, Lippington? Nothing serious, I hope?'

There was a moment's silence, so saturated with suspense that Agaton Sax involuntarily pressed the telephone receiver hard against his ear.

[001]



'Lispington,' he said quietly, his voice suddenly alert, 'what is it? Tell me.'

'Agaton,' said Lispington, echoing his friend's tone, 'I have some disastrous news to communicate to you.'

'I know.'

'You know?' gasped Lispington. 'Tell me what you know.'

[001]



'You tell me first, Lispington.'

'Herr Gustaffson is loose again.'

'I know,' said Agaton Sax, calmly.

'So you said. But if you knew, why didn't you tell me straightaway?'

'Because I only heard ten minutes ago myself. But there's more yet, Lispington.'

'Don't tell me,' whispered Lispington, his face as white as a Form 13B — or even a 16F.

'I'm afraid I must,' said Agaton grimly. 'Our old enemy, Mosca, is also at large.'

'Oh no, oh no,' wailed Lispington. 'You haven't told the British Government yet, I hope? They'll never stop picking on me as long as Mosca is free. But how do you know — and why haven't I been told?'

For at least five seconds there was silence.

'Answer me, Agaton!' Lispington pleaded desperately.

'Are you still on the line?'

'Yes,' said Agaton Sax in a strangely twisted voice.

'What's the matter, old chap?' asked Lispington, quickly recovering from his moment of terror. 'You sound as if your neck had twisted like a corkscrew. It hasn't has it?'

'Yes, it had,' said Agaton Sax, sounding much more like his old self again, forceful and energetic.

'I see,' said Lispington. 'You wouldn't care to tell me *why*, would you? I mean, after all, it's rather a strange thing to do isn't it? Twisting your neck round and round? Have you thought of the risk involved? You might get entangled in the telephone flex, for instance.'

'I'll tell you all about it presently,' answered Agaton Sax. 'What's that?'

'What's what?'

'I heard a noise in your room, Lispington. What was it?'

'Oh, that. It's just my morning tea tray. They bring it every morning at about 10 o'clock. Why?'

'Are there any muffins on the tray?' asked Agaton Sax, refusing to be put off by Lispington's light-hearted answer.

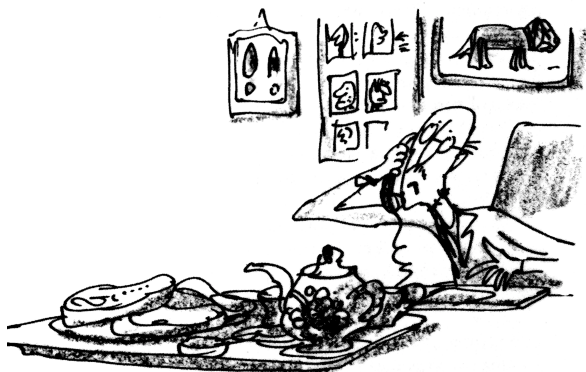
'Muffins? Yes, of course. I'm sorry, Agaton, I should have thought . . . Please help yourself. Oh — how stupid of me, old man; I forgot you're not here.'

'Listen carefully, Lispington. Don't eat any of them until they've been thoroughly tested.'

'Why ever not? They're my favourite muffins, I eat them regularly. Have one yourself. Oh . . . sorry!'

'Don't eat them, I tell you! You're in an extremely dangerous situation, Lispington — one of the worst you've ever been in. *They are striking a blow at both of us at the same time.*'

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'They? Who're they?'

'Herr Gustaffson and Mosca.'

'You frighten me, Agaton!'

'Good! That's exactly what I want to do. Hold on a minute — and don't eat those muffins.'

Agaton Sax's words were followed by an awe-inspiring silence. Lispington's suspicious eye wandered from the yellow tray with its plateful of delicious muffins to the door, which had just closed behind Miss Lucy, that matchless dispenser of tea, coffee and muffins. He saw nothing to arouse his suspicions; no tell-tale signs of danger. A hasty glance at the window drew a blank. There was no one scaling the wall by means of a perilous rope, no one about to smash the window with a blunt instrument. He closed his eyes. If there was someone hidden from his view perhaps he could fool him into thinking his victim had fallen asleep. He waited, then after a minute opened them again; cautiously, first one and then the other. Nothing.

Shrugging his shoulders, he leant back in his chair. 'Agaton,' he called cheerfully. 'Are you sure you won't have a muffin?'

'Lispington,' Agaton Sax answered, speaking with great seriousness. 'This is no time for frivolity. I am at this moment awaiting a very nasty visit from above. In a minute or two a rope ladder will be lowered on to my roof from a helicopter, a helicopter which is hovering over the roof as I speak to you.'

'What! What on earth are you talking about, Agaton? Who's hovering over your roof? And what on earth have they got to do with muffins? Speak up, man, and I'll do everything in my power to lend you assistance.'

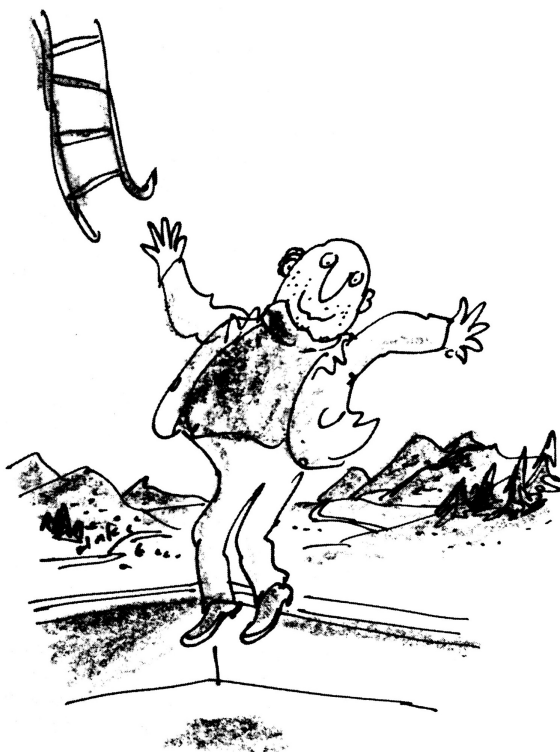
'The most important thing you can do now, Lispington, is not eat those muffins. They are stuffed with dormatolin-hypersomnium-fodatolamino-contraperspical-dormatolinophon, a very powerful sedative, used in the pills commonly known as *Peter Pan's Knock-Out Drops*.'

'Yes, yes, of course I'll be careful, Agaton,' interrupted Lispington impatiently. 'But what about you? Are you taking precautions against that rope ladder and the helicopter?'

'I've got them under close observation all the time. It's not difficult because I have installed all the latest equipment on my roof — radar, hidden microphones, a television camera, a telescope and binoculars and any number of other ingenious devices. I have been anticipating something of this sort for years. When, only a few minutes before you phoned, I got a warning from one of my secret agents in London that both Mosca and Herr Gustaffson had escaped from prison, I concluded, naturally enough, that they would waste no time in making a joint attack on us, determined to rid the world of both of us at the same moment. You were to be put out of action by sleeping pills in your muffins, whereas I was to be eliminated by someone who is due to enter through my window in approximately one minute from now. I was just going to ring you up and warn you, when you rang me.'

'You mean that Mosca will be crashing through your window at any minute?'

'No. It will be either Herr Gustaffson or his deputy managing director, Cauliflower Charlie, who is an expert rope climber — he holds several gold medals awarded by the Union of Amalgamated Criminal Climbers. Oh yes, here he comes. I can just see him now on the television screen. He is emerging cautiously from the helicopter. He is starting to climb down the rope ladder. He's swinging to and fro in the most dangerous manner — oh dear, I hope he won't have a great fall, like Humpty Dumpty. He's coming nearer. He'll land on my roof at any moment. But don't worry, Lispington! I'll take care of this. What you must do is to give the alarm at Scotland Yard, for if Herr Gustaffson has just tried to dope you, his next move must be to kidnap you. Which means that he, or a few carefully picked assistants, are at this very moment sneaking through the corridors of Scotland Yard itself. Get going, Lispington. This is the chance of a lifetime to teach the Government who's master. After this they will never dare nag you again.'



'Right, Agaton, I'll give the alarm, and you keep a watch on that window of yours.'

'But don't hang up, Lispington. I'll have more news for you when I've dealt with this swinging crook.'

Lispington pressed several buttons on his desk, then dashed out of his office with one muffin in each hand, while Agaton Sax calmly resumed his careful scrutiny of the television screen, which showed the crook hanging from the ladder slowly approaching the roof. Now his feet were touching the tarred roofing felt. Now he let go of the ladder. Now he bounced about the roof like a rubber ball. Yes, it was Cauliflower Charlie all right, his big ears red with excitement, his eyes alert and his bottom lip quivering slightly, for he knew that this was the most daring mission to which he had ever been assigned. Having finished his bouncing and come to a standstill, he took a deep breath, just as if he were about to plunge into the sea on a dangerous diving mission.

Agaton Sax had not had time to consult his computer, Clever Dick, but he was sure that that super-intelligent thought machine (which incidentally could think as quickly as Agaton Sax himself) would whole-heartedly approve of what he was going to do next.

The helicopter was hovering at the same height, hanging almost motionless in the air. The rope ladder was still there, swinging gently in the light breeze, so that from time to time it seemed to brush against Cauliflower Charlie's ears; ears that were now not only

red, but actually trembling with anticipation as he thought of the glorious victory that would soon be his. Charlie himself had crept cautiously to the edge of the roof, and was standing on a spot exactly above the windows of Agaton's editorial office. Agaton was watching him on the television screen. It had not escaped his notice that Cauliflower Charlie was familiar with the plan of the building. As soon as he touched down on the roof he had made his way straight to the spot where he now stood — obviously someone had told him to examine the building closely while he was climbing down the ladder.

Cauliflower Charlie had something in his right hand, something which he was clutching with almost reverent care as he checked the long string fastened to it.

Agaton Sax knew exactly what it was. He had known even before he set eyes on it. With a nod of grim satisfaction he slowly reached for a metal box lying on his desk, and glanced at the rows of buttons adorning its heavy lid! Each button was carefully labelled with words such as: STOP, LIFT ROOF, LAND, TAKE-OFF, FLOODLIGHTS, RADAR. He pressed the pink button marked voice, and hardly had he done so when a thin tube shot up from an alabaster ashtray in front of him. The tube was a microphone. He spoke slowly into it.

'Is that you, Lisington?'

A loudspeaker positioned carefully on the roof carried his voice to the very spot where Cauliflower Charlie was preparing to start on the second and most decisive part of his mission. He winced, turned as white as a sheet, and, almost staggering, glanced fearfully round him as if he expected to see an avenging angel emerge from the clouds to threaten him.

'Lisington — is that you?' asked Agaton Sax again. 'I wasn't expecting you until noon. It's lucky I'm alone — my aunt has just gone shopping. Hello, Lisington, do you hear me?'

'Yes — yes — of course,' stammered Cauliflower Charlie, who was only now beginning to realize the importance of this stroke of luck. Agaton Sax was expecting Lisington, but not until noon. Yet he had jumped to the conclusion that the helicopter belonged to Scotland Yard, so the man on the roof must be Lisington.

'It's good to hear your voice again, went on Agaton Sax genially. 'Come on down and join me in a cup of coffee.'

'Yes, yes . . . I'm coming, ' said Cauliflower Charlie. 'You see I'm early because the forecast people said that winds would be easterly and very light, but they turned out to be westerly and very strong so I got here over an hour sooner than I expected to.'

'Ha, you can never trust them, can you? A lot of windbags, that's what I call them. They'd do better if they licked their fingers and stuck them out of the window.'

'You're right there, Agaton, ha! ha! ha!' laughed Cauliflower Charlie, making a brave attempt to imitate Lisington's voice.

'You know the way, don't you, old chap?' said Agaton affably. 'Just open the roof hatch, scramble down the fire escape, walk along the corridor past the attics, then down a short flight of steps and you are at my office door. Right?'

'What the deuce are you talking about?' came a sharp voice. 'What hatch? What fire escape? Agaton, are you all right? What the dickens are you raving about?'

It was Lisington's voice, and it was agitated, excited and unexpected. It gave Agaton Sax quite a shock; it was the last thing he wanted to hear at such a dramatic moment. Then he remembered that neither he nor Lisington had hung up. Quickly he seized the telephone receiver and whispered hoarsely:

'Shut up, old man, I'm just putting him off the scent.'

Lispington suppressed a gasp, then automatically took one of the muffins off the plate, but, remembering Agaton's warning in time, threw it on his desk.

Agaton waited in silence, listening tensely for any sound that would tell him his plan was working. Even if he had succeeded in making Cauliflower Charlie believe he had mistaken him for Lispington, he knew that dangerous crook would hardly run the risk of climbing down the fire escape. No — Cauliflower Charlie would have other plans. He was holding something in his right hand, and that something was a small, but extremely efficient weapon, with a long string attached to it.

Agaton Sax knew that at any moment now this weapon would be used against him. That was why he was waiting in such suspense; that was why, quickly and carefully, he fastened something over his nose and mouth.

2 Attack Repulsed

Agaton Sax counted the seconds, his eyes fixed on the television screen. Cauliflower Charlie seemed to be plucking up courage before making the decisive move. He was breathing heavily; aware, no doubt, what a dangerous enemy he was up against. He peered cautiously over the edge of the roof to make sure that he was in the right spot to attack the window. He raised his arm, and Agaton Sax was aware of a sudden flash as the sunlight was reflected in the highly polished surface of the weapon in his enemy's hand.

Suddenly, it was off on its deadly journey — the glittering weapon suspended from a thin but strong nylon thread shot straight out through the air, then dropped down and swung back, crashing through the window. It hit the floor only a few inches from where Agaton Sax was waiting for it, superbly calm and composed.

It was a small, cone-shaped bottle with a skull and crossbones on it. On hitting the floor it exploded with a little bang emitting a pinkish cloud of gas which spread rapidly over the room, and in less than three seconds permeated the atmosphere.

If Agaton Sax had been caught unawares he would fallen asleep immediately, for the gas was made up of precisely the same formula as the one which had been so cunningly smuggled into Lispington's muffins. It was a formula especially beloved of villains, since it suited their purposes so well. Its effect was instantaneous but short-lived — the air in an affected room cleared quickly once the victim had been laid low. Being only too well aware of his opponents' treacherous natures, Agaton Sax had anticipated just such a plot, and equipped himself with a gas-mask of his own design. That was why he was in a position to wait so calmly for the attack that he knew was coming.



As always with Agaton Sax, a period of calm watchfulness was followed by one of frenzied activity. As soon as he was satisfied the gas had evaporated, he tore off his gas-mask, shot out of his chair like a rocket, dashed to the wardrobe, grabbed a pair of shoes, a black hat, a blanket, a pillow, a jacket and a pair of trousers, and arranged them all quickly and neatly on the floor, just inside the door. He had hardly finished when Lisington's voice was heard again:

'Hello, Agaton, I thought I heard a little bang — are you all right?'

'Quite all right, thank you.'

'Just cracked a bottle of champagne, eh? A bit thirty?'

'That's the idea, Lisington. Now, keep listening if you don't mind, because in three or four minutes I'll have fresh instructions for you. All right?'

'All right.'

Agaton Sax put down the receiver. The stealthy footsteps he had heard in the corridor came to a halt outside his door, so he crossed the room and hid behind the thick curtain which Aunt Matilda had woven for him herself. Behind the curtain he had set up a small television screen on which he could watch Cauliflower Charlie.

The crook bent down and peered through the keyhole. Splendid! He rubbed his hands together. He could see his fat little foe lying sound asleep on the floor. It would take less than a quarter of an hour to hoist him into the helicopter and then whisk him off to Herr Gustaffson's headquarters in London. Excellent! Cauliflower Charlie was already congratulating himself on the skill with which he had carried out the plan.

Completely ignorant of the fact that Agaton Sax was watching every movement, he carefully turned the doorknob and opened the door, very slowly and gently, so as not to wake up the gentleman who was sleeping so peacefully on the floor. There now he bent over his victim, whose rosy face was hidden beneath a ridiculous little black bowler hat. Cauliflower Charlie could not repress a chuckle as he gloated over the prostrate form of his deadly enemy, silent, helpless, out of the running: in short, entirely at his mercy. He, Cauliflower Charlie, had taken care of the most dangerous detective of them all in a matter of a few minutes. Snapping his fingers gleefully and laughing out loud he murmured: 'Lucky old Charlie, this should get you a rise of at least four quid a week; genuine money too. You'll be able to buy yourself a new hat next Christmas.'

Still chuckling happily, he went over to the broken window, leant out and waved to the pilot of the helicopter, who waved back. Satisfied that his signal had been acknowledged he turned round — only to find himself looking straight into the cool, staring eyes of — Agaton Sax. A spasm of fear shot through his body, he shuddered convulsively and felt, suddenly, very cold.

'You fool,' said Agaton Sax, locking the handcuffs round his victim's trembling wrists, 'what made you think you could outwit me — Agaton Sax — with a lot of ridiculous little tricks? Who's up there in the helicopter? Smiling Sandra Smith or Hopeless O'Donovan?'

'Neither of them, sir,' whispered Cauliflower Charlie feebly.

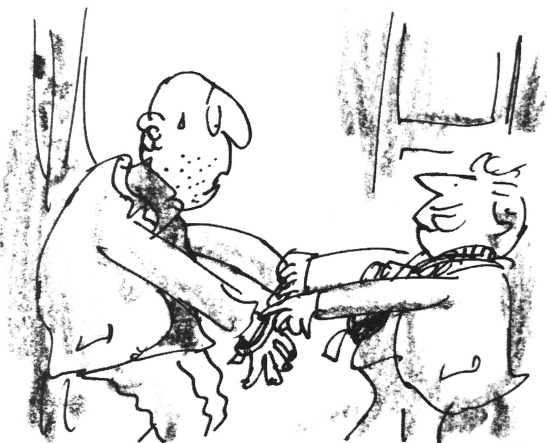
'Who is it then?' thundered Agaton Sax.

'Must I tell you, sir?'

'Of course you must, you've no choice, have you, muggins?'

'Not really, sir, no. It's Laughing Willie Williams, sir.'

ONE



'Of course, I should have known. He's an expert helicopter pilot. Is he alone?'

'He is now, sir; he has been ever since I left.'

'And who sent you?'

'Herr Gustaffson, sir.'

'And where did you think you were going to take me?'

'To Headquarters, sir.'

'And where are Headquarters?'

'In Colindale, sir, 103 Shrub Lane. It's a disused garage.'

'Does it have a telephone number.'

'It's 999 9999.'

'Ha! You can't get any higher than that, can you? And where were you planning to land when you got to London?'

'On a field ten minutes' drive from the garage, sir. We were due between six and seven o'clock tonight. Here's a map. X marks the landing strip.'

'Good. You know, of course, what will happen to you if you lie to Agaton Sax?'

'I do, sir. That's why I don't.'

'You don't? But you just said you do?'

'I mean that's why I don't lie.'

'All right. Now, you see that door? I'm going to lock you up in there, and whatever happens, stay put. But first, hand over your walkie-talkie.'

Cauliflower Charlie did as he was told. He knew only too well how useless it was to attempt anything else.

Agaton Sax spoke into the walkie-talkie:

'Hello, Laughing Willie, Cauliflower Charlie here. Are you receiving me?'

'You bet I am, old man. Have you wrapped him up yet?'

'Sure, he's a really neat parcel.'

'First class, eh?' roared Laughing Willie. 'Ha! ha! ha! ha! So let's load him on board and be off. I don't like this place. It smells fishy! Ha! ha! ha! ha!'

'Right oh! But listen, Laughing Willie,' went on Agaton Sax. 'I lift him by myself — You'll have to come down and help me.'

'What did you say? Come down? Are you raving?'

'No. But you must do what I tell you. We can't manage, otherwise.'

'Why the devil should I? I'm a flyer, old man, not a snail. I don't crawl along carrying things on my back. Just hoist him up and we'll be away.'

'O.K. If that's the way you want it, Laughing Willie. You fly off, I stay here. But you'll laugh on the other side of your face when you realise it's not just our fat friend I couldn't lift. There's about three million pounds' worth of solid gold bars in here, and they'll all be mine — even if I do have to carry them on my back like a snail.'

'What? What's that? You nuts or something?'

'No, I'm not nuts,' said Agaton Sax, 'but I have just found three gold bars in the safe — that's why the job took a little longer than I thought. Now, I can either keep them for myself, go off somewhere and set up in business on my own, or you can come and help me to lift them into the helicopter. Then we fly back with Agaton Fatty Sax but we don't say a word to Herr Gustaffson about the gold. When he's paid us off, we sell the gold and share the profit, 60% for me and 40% for you. What do you think?'

'You treacherous devil! I wouldn't have believed it of you! O.K., we share 60/40. I get the 60. Ha! ha! ha!' He paused, then as the full significance of Cauliflower Charlie's proposal hit him, added, 'You really do mean just the two of us, do you?'

'Of course.'

'And not tell the boss or any of the others?'

'Of course not.'

'Well, well ... You *are* a treacherous devil, aren't you? Ha! ha! ha! ha! I'm with you. I've always been a firm believer in the principles of solidarity and fair shares. 60 for me and 40 for you. Splendid, oh splendid! Ha! Ha! Ha!'

'It's a deal, then. As I said, 60 for me and 40 for you. Land on the roof, and we'll heave our cargo on board — Fatty and the gold bars. Come down now, the coast clear! Once you're on the roof, climb down the escape, then follow the corridor and it's the door at

the end. You can't miss it.'

Agaton Sax watched the manoeuvres of the helicopter as it slowly descended to the roof. A few passers-by had gathered on the pavement in front of Bykoping Post Office to admire the machine, displaying a banner on the fuselage bearing the legend SUPPORT CHILDREN'S DAY Agaton Sax waved cheerfully at them, then turned his attention to the television screen, in time to see Laughing Willie Williams scramble hurriedly out of the helicopter a broad smile on his cheerful face. There was no doubt about his impatience as he tugged at the hatch and tumbled pell-mell down the fire escape. For a few seconds Agaton Sax lost sight of him on the screen, but he could hear him running along the corridor, chuckling to himself — the picture of a perfectly happy crook if ever there was one.

'Open the door, Cauliflower Charlie,' he sang out, 'I can't wait to see my gold bars, ha! ha! ha!'

'I bet you can't,' said Agaton Sax grimly as threw open the door and stripped out into the corridor, blinding Laughing Willie Williams with the beam of his powerful torch.

The poor man staggered back, his eager smile freezing into a ghastly grin as he automatically raised his hands above his head. Trembling in every limb, he could not take his eyes off the dreadful sight that confronted him. The torchlight had dazzled him, but not enough to prevent him from recognizing the face that strikes terror into the hearts of all true crooks, the face of the most dangerous man known to the Underworld. The face of Agaton Sax.

How many times, in the criminal evening classes which he attended twice a week, had he not, along with the rest of the class, been called upon to study with the utmost application and attention to detail countless portraits of this fearful sleuth? How often had he listened to the headmaster, in his monthly Address to the Pupils, warning them against this living threat to the trade? Only two years ago the School Board had found it necessary to run a compulsory course lasting twenty weeks, under the title *Possible Methods of Controlling Agaton Sax*. (Fee: 25 guineas, genuine money.) Even at that rate people were prepared to pay, and to buy the handbook on the subject which the headmaster himself had written, and which cost 10 guineas (genuine money).

And now Laughing Willie Williams was literally face to face with the object of his studies. All the money and all the time and energy he had spent on his education was absolutely worthless. Paralysed, he obeyed Agaton Sax's every order. In less than two minutes he had joined Cauliflower Charlie in the wardrobe, handcuffed, and silently bemoaning his wasted 35 guineas. He wouldn't even succeed in getting a refund for it; indeed, he remembered ruefully that when he had applied to the authorities for tax relief on expenses for advanced professional training they had been very rude and told him their time was too valuable to waste on practical jokers.

Agaton Sax, satisfied with his work, went over to the telephone.

'Hello, Lisington, are you still there?'

'I'm here, Agaton. Patient as ever. How are you getting on?'

'Fine. Cauliflower Charlie and Laughing Willie Williams are safely locked up. How about you?'

'Well ... Not so good, actually. I just arrested two suspicious looking characters, and they turned out to be two men from the Ministry starting an enquiry into Scotland Yard's consumption of paper clips, carbon paper and india rubbers. I had to let them go.'

'You did well, Lisington. I hope they'll leave your inkwells alone from now on. It looks as if the crooks who were planning to kidnap you backed out as soon as they noticed you never touched those muffins.'

'Could be. I've had them analysed, by the way, and you were right.'

'Naturally. Listen, Lisington, what we've got to do now is make Herr Gustaffson believe that Cauliflower Charlie and Laughing Willie Williams really got me. How do you suggest we go about it?'

'A word in the ear of the *Morning Clarion* might do it.'

'A splendid idea, Lisington. But I fear we can't wait till tomorrow. You see, Herr Gustaffson is expecting them back in London in a little over seven hours. Would you send a statement to the BBC, announcing that reliable sources report that Agaton Sax left Bykoping, Sweden, in a helicopter at 11.15 this morning, after a plot to kidnap him had been uncovered. You'd better add that Scotland Yard cannot release any further details until they are sure Agaton Sax is safe. When the crooks hear a statement like that from you on the one o'clock news, they will feel absolutely sure the two men sent to Bykoping have been successful, and they will be looking forward eagerly to their triumphant return with the captured Agaton Sax on board. Do you follow me?'

'To a T, Agaton,' said Lisington, delighted. 'T for Triumph!'

'Right. Even better, I already know the address of their temporary headquarters in London.'

'Splendid! Let me have it, and I'll be there within the hour to have them picked up.'

'Oh no, Lisington, don't you think that would be unwise? You would run the risk of only catching the small fry, whereas the big game might slip through your disappointed fingers, so to speak. No, you must await my arrival in London, and we'll make a plan together. Don't you think that would be better?'

'I suppose you're right,' said Lisington grudgingly.

'I'll start immediately, and you can expect me in London at roughly 18.00 hours. I can land on the roof of Scotland Yard as usual, I suppose? Splendid. Cheerio then, Lisington, I'll be seeing you.'

There was no time to lose. He called the Bykoping Police and spoke to the faithful Mr Antonson, always on duty.

'Hello, Antonson, Agaton Sax here. I have some big game for you this time. Bring your assistant and come and get them. They are in my wardrobe. But remember: once I've gone they'll get over their fright and may try to get away. What's the charge? Well, call it "assault on Agaton Sax and plot to poison muffins." No, not ruffians — muffins. Sounds odd? Yes, I suppose it does, nevertheless it's the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. They were Lisington's muffins, you see. Yes, come over as soon as you can, or sooner. Aunt Matilda is out shopping, so we can have a quick drink to celebrate. You never drink on duty? We won't then. Take care, Antonson.'

3 Strange Headquarters and a Stranger Language

When Agaton Sax landed on Scotland Yard's spacious roof some hours later, Lisington was already there, settled comfortably in an armchair and following his descent through a pair of binoculars. He was also enjoying a fine quality cigar, alternately puffing at it, and scanning the sky through the binoculars. Once or twice, however, he surprised himself by taking a puff at the binoculars and putting the cigar to his eye.

'Glad to see you looking so fit, Agaton,' he boomed, as the helicopter touched down and its door swung open.

'Any news of the ringleaders?' asked Agaton Sax, emerging from the helicopter and shaking hands with his old friend.

'Not so far. We've no idea how they managed to smuggle those muffins on to the tray destined for my office, but we'll get to the bottom of it — I'm taking care of the investigation myself.'

'It's of no importance, Lisington. All that matters is that you're awake. You know, one small bite would have sent you off to the Land of Nod for the next twenty-four hours.'

Lisington seemed not to have heard this last remark. Instead he turned to his friend and asked, 'What's the plan, Agaton?'

'Well, we ought to take two of your toughest sergeants with us. There's plenty of room in the helicopter. Have a look at this map. We've got to come down here—' (he pointed to a cross on the map). 'The gang is waiting there, looking forward to the arrival of Cauliflower Charlie and Laughing Willie Williams with their prisoner, Agaton Sax. They're due in about half an hour. Are you coming, Lisington?'

'Of course, Agaton, anything you say. Give me a few minutes to get hold of a couple of good chaps. We'll pick better ones than the two you just locked up, eh?' he joked as he disappeared inside the building.

Agaton took the opportunity of eating a cold snack which Aunt Matilda had prepared for him before he left Byköping. He greeted the two police sergeants warmly, knowing from experience what a high standard of watchfulness and initiative all Lisington's assistants achieved. Then the four of them climbed into the helicopter and set out on their short journey, Agaton outlining his plan to the others as they headed north.

Though the sun was setting, it was still light. Even Agaton Sax would not have dared to attempt a night landing on an unknown and unlit strip of waste land in Colindale.

'There it is,' he said suddenly, pointing to a small patch of green, dotted here and there with little clumps of trees. A narrow track, hardly more than a path, crossed the field, which appeared to be completely empty.

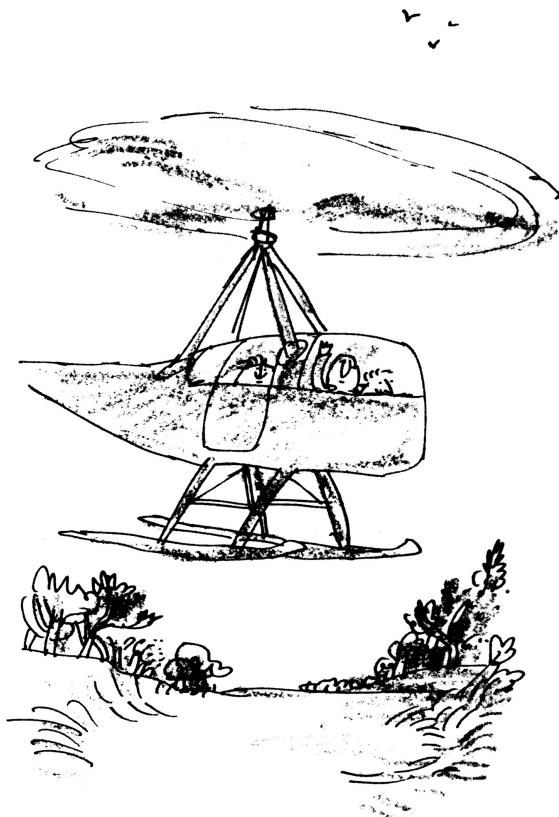
'I don't like it,' said Lisington. 'As empty as a football pitch on a Monday morning. Do you think they've smelt a rat?'

'No,' said Agaton Sax confidently. 'I sent Herr Gustaffson a telegram to let him know that Agaton Sax had been taken care of according to instructions — mission fulfilled, in fact — and signed it Cauliflower Charlie and Laughing Willie Williams.'

'Suppose the telegraph boy couldn't find the garage.' persisted Lisington, who seemed to be suddenly very despondent.

'But he did,' said Agaton Sax, pointing again. 'Look! There's a car hidden among the trees over there. And do you see that man? He's watching us through his binoculars — it must be the Sneaker. That's Herr Gustaffson's reception committee, sent as reinforcements to make sure I don't give them the slip. Now, one of you must get down on the floor. Remember, there's only supposed to be three of us — the two crooks and myself.'

[001]



They won't be able to recognize us from the ground, but they could easily count us.'

'Do you think Herr Gustaffson or Mosca might be in the car?' asked Lisington anxiously.

'No, I don't. They don't take that sort of risk. Are we ready?'

'I only hope you're right, Agaton.' Lisington sounded only half convinced.

Agaton Sax landed the helicopter gently. One of the sergeants, who bore some resemblance to Cauliflower Charlie, waved at the car, which was still hidden behind the trees. Then, suddenly, it moved forward across the grass. Four men jumped out of it and hurried towards the helicopter.

Agaton Sax watched them calmly, then, just at the right moment jumped to the ground and stood before them, motionless, his steel-blue eyes staring coldly at them. Then, still silent, he raised his right arm in a gesture of unmistakeable authority. It was a tense moment, but he carried it off superbly.

'Halt!' he cried, 'I am Agaton Sax! Stay where you are. Don't move. Moreover I am not alone. Behind me is Inspector Lisington of Scotland Yard and two of his best men. A hundred policemen surround the field. Don't try any nonsense. You haven't a chance in a million of getting away.'

'You are under arrest,' said Lisington grim behind Agaton Sax's left shoulder.

The four men had stopped dead the very moment they realized that the man who was speaking to them was in fact Agaton Sax, and that far from being a prisoner he was very much in command of proceedings. Slowly automatically, they raised their hands above their heads above their heads, shaking in every limb, their teeth chattering so loudly Lisington cried out:

'Whoever's playing the xylophone, stop. This is no time for frivolity!'

Lisington's voice seemed to break the spell that held the crooks. One of them suddenly found his tongue and cried out piteously:

'Dear Professor Sax, you have a kind heart; you can't do this to me! I have a mother and five sisters to provide for '

'Mr Sax, sir,' called another, 'I'm not really one of the gang. I thought we were here to pick up a few sacks of potatoes, that's all.'

'So did I, your lordship,' called a third, 'only I was told it was dustbins.'

'I don't believe a word of it,' said Agaton Sax sharply. 'Now, look here, if you want any mercy from me, you'd better answer my questions truthfully. If you do, I'll put in a good word for you in court. If you don't, I'll see it goes hard for you. Do you understand?'

'Yes, Professor Sax!'

'Yes, indeed, sir!'

'Yes, your Highness!'

'Good. So, first: what is the password?'

Silence. The four wretched men seemed to have been struck dumb.

'Well?'

One of them — Agaton Sax had no difficulty in recognizing him as Finn the Forger — stepped forward, obviously trying to overcome his fear.

'Sir . . . your lordship,' he stammered, 'the password is BLOW UP FATTY, sir.'

'How childish,' Agaton Sax with great dignity. 'It's stupid, uncalled for, and, in the circumstances, very inappropriate.'

'I agree with you, sir, I really do.'

'All right. That's enough of that. Now. Is Herr Gustaffson expecting you to bring Agaton Sax to him in the garage ? '

'Yes, sir. It's only five minutes' drive from here.'

'Is Professor Mosca there?'

'No, sir, not at the moment. Herr Gustaffson is our boss, but we've been told that Mosca is likely to show up, sir.'

'Very well, that's all I need to know for the time being.' Turning to Lispington he added: 'Tell your men to take them in charge. I suggest we push on alone.'

'Alone? But wouldn't it be better if we surrounded the garage and arrested them?'

'No, Lispington, if we do that, Mosca will slip through our fingers. And he is far too dangerous to risk that, don't you agree?'

'I suppose so,' said Lispington glumly. 'You're probably right. But what exactly do you want to do?'

Agaton Sax told him. Lispington stared, quite shocked, and shook his head incredulously.

'Cheer up, old man,' Agaton Sax reassured him, with a kindly pat on the shoulder. 'We've already done this sort of thing together many times, you know. We'll show Herr Gustaffson who's boss.'

They drove the car slowly along a narrow track through the trees, spotting features in the landscape which matched the information the crooks had given them; and also tallied with the rough map Cauliflower Charlie had drawn.

Lispington had been driving for a couple of minutes when Agaton Sax suddenly pointed ahead.

'There! Slow down, Lispington, we're getting warm! See that dilapidated old garage over there? That's the one we want.'

'Are you sure those two weren't having us on?' Lispington was still suspicious. 'Out of the question. They may be crooks but they aren't fools. They know who to put their money on.'

'When do we stop?'

'We stop at nothing, Lispington!'

'I mean do we stop and hide the car here?'

'That's a good idea. Then we can close in on them through the trees, approaching the garage from the rear, just at the bottom of that little slope. Right?'

'Right, let's pull off the road now, there are plenty of bushes here that will hide the car.'

Having concealed the car they set off on foot for the garage, moving slowly and cautiously through the dusk. Suddenly, Agaton Sax touched Lispington on the arm.

'Do you know something, Lispington?'

'No; what?'

'They've not got electricity. There aren't any wires.'

'They're probably using torches.'

'I suppose so. But why can't we see *any* sign of life? There's no car, no motor-bicycle, no light anywhere. Could it be that . . .?'

'That what?'

'Never mind, I was just thinking. . . .'

'By this time they were only about ten yards from the rear of the garage.'

'Listen, Lispington, I think I know why the place seems to be deserted. Remember, they are eagerly, desperately even, awaiting a most exciting piece of news . . .'

'Namely?'

'Namely,' said Agaton Sax irritably, almost losing patience with his friend, 'namely, that Agaton Sax, who had been taken prisoner in Sweden, is even now being brought to them.'

[001]



'Oh, I see.'

'Well, how do you think you would be feeling in that situation, supposing you were a crook? Wouldn't you be . . . nervous . . . restless . . . even on tenterhooks until you saw for yourself that your scheme had been successful?'

'Well, er . . . yes, well I suppose so, supposing I were a crook,' Lispington answered vaguely.

'I should think you would,' said Agaton Sax, relieved to have got the answer he wanted at last. 'Now, what would you do to steady your nerves?'

'Well ... I might play croquet, or ... '

'Croquet?!' exploded Agaton Sax, almost forgetting to whisper. 'Cards, or draughts, maybe. I mean, *you* might as a crook, that is — but *these* crooks — no! That's not what they'd do. No — they would drive off to that hill over there. Do you see it?'

Lispington stared, first at the hill some half mile away then at Agaton Sax.

'Why to the hill?' he asked, completely perplexed.

'Because they calculated that from there they would be able to watch the helicopter land. You see, they were so nervous they simply had to watch it come down and make sure their chaps in the car met up with it. But thank Heavens, I guessed they might do something like that, so I touched down a few hundred yards south of the spot with a cross on the map, at a place where couldn't actually see us land, or watch our meeting with their men. Which means that they don't yet know for certain either that we've landed, or that I have been safely handed over. They must have seen us approach but will think we overshot the landing spot. They can't even be sure their car has spotted us.'

'Which means they are probably still waiting on the hill?' said Lispington.

'Exactly. Which means, in its turn, that they will go on waiting there for some time; waiting for a sign that all is well.'

'Or alternatively some of them might return to the garage, while the others stay on the hill,' asked Lispington, determined not to let Agaton Sax come up with all the answers.

'Precisely, Lispington. So what I suggest we do is this. I'll have a look inside the garage. If I find a suitable hiding place, I'll stay put so I can spy on them when they come back. If not, I'll join you and we'll make a new plan. I suggest that you stay here. We can use our walkie-talkies so we won't lose touch. Let's test them now to make sure they're working.'

Agaton Sax walked off until he was some ten yards from Lispington. The walkie-talkies were beautifully constructed machines, specially made for Agaton Sax, to his own design, by Europe's most skilled technicians, and financed by Interpol. They were working perfectly.

It was decided that Lispington should conceal himself in a small corrugated iron shed that stood at the bottom of the slope, behind the garage.

Agaton Sax tiptoed to the garage. It had two small windows which were so dirty that it was impossible to see anything through them, but nevertheless it was plain that the place was completely deserted, although Agaton Sax, with the help of a magnifying glass and an electric torch, found unmistakeable signs on the ground inside the garage that the crooks had been there only a short while ago. He concluded that at least some of them were certain to be back pretty soon.

The door was closed but not locked; there would have been no point in locking it, because there was absolutely nothing worth stealing, except perhaps one very old car which might have been of interest to a really dedicated collector of old crows, a few dilapidated wooden chairs and a rickety table with an empty bottle on it that held the remains of a candle.

To call a lousy dump like this 'Headquarters' must be some sort of private joke among

the gang, mused Agaton Sax, thoughtfully stroking his neatly trimmed mustache. No, he decided, even they couldn't really make it their headquarters, it must be a temporary hideout specially chosen for tonight's operation because it was so near the landing strip.

He went up to the old car, which, on closer inspection, looked as if it were old and rare enough for a place in a museum. It was certainly a good deal older than Agaton Sax, though not in anything like such good condition. It only had three wheels, or, to be more correct, there was a fourth, but it had been removed and rigged up as a makeshift gambling table (or so Agaton Sax thought, because there was a King of Hearts and a ten of Clubs lying on its hub cap).

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It did not take Agaton Sax long to realize that the old car would afford him an excellent hiding place. It stood in a corner of the garage about five yards from the table and chairs. Between the wall and the rear of the car there was a heap of old tarpaulins; and, better still, the back door of the garage was just behind them so that, if by some unlucky chance the crooks should find Agaton Sax, he could use the tarpaulins as cover, make a dash for the back door and disappear among the trees.

After careful thought he decided to hide among the tarpaulins rather than in the car,

and pulled one of them over him. Satisfied that he was completely concealed, he took a pencil and paper out of his pocket, and, holding the pencil in his left hand, wrote a note in capital letters. Then, making sure he was still alone, he walked to the table, placed the note on it, and returned to his hiding place. Now he was ready to check with Lispington. He pressed the button on his walkie-talkie and spoke into it.

'Hello, Lispington, are you there? Over.'

'I'm here. Where else could I be? But listen, Agaton, don't you think this is all rather silly? Over.'

'No, Lispington. Think of it as a battle. You are covering the enemy's flank, and I am covering the front. If we keep in touch with each other all the time we can follow his movements in detail, you see. Over.'

'I wish I could see a bit more, actually. It's so damned dark out here. Over.'

'Don't let that worry you, old man,' said Agaton Sax cheerfully. 'But tell me, is your microphone all right? Over.'

'Yes perfectly. Why? Over.'

'Well you sound . . . sort of different,' replied Agaton Sax warily. 'The microphone is so small, I thought perhaps you might have got it caught behind your lapel or something. You haven't by any chance hidden the microphone under your lapel, have you? Over.'

'Oh no — on the lapel, on it. Ha! ha! ha!' laughed Lispington. 'No, Agaton, you're quite wrong, but don't worry, I'll tell you later. Just a little secret of mine, he, he! Funny that you noticed it, though. Over.'

Frowning, Agaton Sax was about to press Lispington further, when his friend whispered hoarsely into his microphone:

'They're coming, Agaton! I can see the headlights of their car on the track. It's approaching rapidly. Be careful, Agaton, they'll be hurtling into the garage at any minute! Over.'

'Thanks for the warning, Lispington. I'm ready. If I lower my voice like this can you hear me distinctly?' he went on in a low whisper. 'Over.'

'Yes, Agaton, I am receiving you loud and clear. Now the car is stopping in front of the garage. One, two, three . . . oh, damn it! The rascals! They've crammed nine of them into a four-seater! The check of it! Overloading a car right under the nose of Scotland Yard's most senior official. Watch out. Agaton, they are storming the front door! Over.'

The door was thrown open, and the beams of five or six torches lit up the darkness of the garage. At the head of them was a man whom Agaton Sax instantly recognized. His sharp, intelligent face, his proud bearing, his quick, resolute movements — everything indicated that this man was one of Agaton Sax's most formidable enemies. This was Herr Gustaffson, there could be no mistaking him. The two men had often met in single combat, and the fight had been hard, but Agaton Sax had always won in the end. But the story after every encounter had always been the same: no sooner had Herr Gustaffson, thanks to Agaton Sax's indefatigable skill, been placed behind bars, than he managed to escape. He himself would devise the plan, and his faithful henchmen would carry it out; men like Ernest 'Fingers' Dodge, Fat John, Hopeless O'Donovan, Laughing Willie Williams, Cauliflower Charlie, these and invaluable women — yes, on more than one occasion Herr Gustaffson would have remained a prisoner without the help of Russian Rita, Rosa Pasta and Smiling Sandra Smith.



Herr Gustaffson strode quickly up to the table and seized the chairman's gavel lying there. Fascinated, Agaton Sax settled down to enjoy the proceedings which he knew were about to start. He saw Herr Gustaffson stare at the slip of paper on the table. While he read it, motionless, nobody spoke. As if by common consent his companions remained silent, and no one dared move. They watched Herr Gustaffson with frozen stares. He himself said not a word, just clenched his fist, waved the gavel still clutched in his right hand, then began to pace up and down, his face white, but with a hectic flush glowing on each cheek.

Agaton Sax knew Herr Gustaffson's character as well as the inside of his own pocket and this reaction came as no surprise to him. What he had not foreseen was that Lispington's voice would be the one to break the silence.

'Hello, Agaton, two men are approaching. What the devil's going on? Why are they coming here? They're making for the shed, not the garage. Can you hear me? Over.'

'Yes, I can hear you, Lispington. They're probably just guards that Herr Gustaffson has posted round the garage.'

'I hope . . . hrrhrrr'

'What's that?' whispered Agaton Sax. 'Over.'

'Mrhrt arh crpht ...? Rharhrm phrsft?' said Lispington in a strangely hoarse voice.

'Lispington! I can't hear you what you are saying,' whispered Agaton Sax, his concern growing. 'Over.'

'Ptshmfdrhstrm . . . ?' said Lispington. 'Brpht.'

'Tell me what secret code you're using, Lispington,' urged Agaton Sax. 'Is it xw 27 or GMT 13:00? Over.'

To Agaton Sax's immense consternation, Lispington answered:

' Lpthrn hratmsphterms!'

4 A Prisoner in his own Home

Agaton Sax was in despair. Lispington's extraordinary behaviour had come at a most inopportune moment, just J Herr Gustaffson was going to tell the others about the little note he had found on the table. So Agaton Sax was faced with a terrible dilemma: should he go on trying to interpret the mysterious messages Lispington was sending him in some unknown code, or should he listen to Herr Gustaffson's comments and, last but not least, to the orders and instructions he would doubtless be giving to his confederates?

As it happened, he was not given the chance to choose, because neither Lispington nor Herr Gustaffson spoke. Lispington, in spite of Agaton Sax's frantic, repeated whispers didn't answer him, and it was obvious that all radio communication between them had broken down. Herr Gustaffson just went on pacing silently up and down, up and down, now and then pausing to stare angrily at the note Agaton Sax had left on the table.

Herr Gustaffson was indeed a cool customer; his icy presence of mind was second only to Agaton Sax's own. But it was plain that this time he was as near an explosion as any man could be without actually blowing up. The veins of his temples swelled with suppressed fury, and there was such restrained rage in all his movements that the other crooks, who had been standing near the table withdrew into the corners of the garage like so many frightened rabbits bolting into their holes.

In spite of the gravity of the situation Agaton Sax could not resist chuckle as he observed Herr Gustaffson's reactions to the note.

Suddenly the pacing stopped. Herr Gustaffson brought the gavel down on to the table with a frightful bang, then held up the slip of paper so everyone could see it, roaring at the top of his voice:

'Do you know what this is? Do you? Does anyone?'

There was a terrified silence. Who would have dared admit that he knew, even if he did?

'I'll tell you, you milksops. It's a note from — well, can you guess? No, of course you can't, you're too stupid. I'll tell you: it's from *Cauliflower Charlie* — your mate. And do you know what he says? No, you don't know, because if you did, it would mean you're a pack of traitors, and I would have wrung your necks when I first read it. Listen to this, listen to what this lowdown, treacherous, dishonest crook has the intolerable cheek to write to me, Herr Gustaffson, his own boss. Listen!

WE CAME HERE WITH OUR PRECIOUS CARGO, FATTY AGATON SAX — BUT YOU WERE NOT HERE, HERR GUSTAFFSON. SO WE LEFT. WE HOPE YOU CAN RAISE THE £6,000,000 (GENUINE MONEY) WE DEMAND FOR HANDING HIM OVER TO YOU, CARRIAGE PAID. DON'T TRY TO ANSWER UNTIL I GET IN TOUCH WITH YOU. IF YOU CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS, LET ME KNOW BY PUTTING AN AD IN 'THE TIMES'. AND DON'T THINK YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH PLAYING ANY OF YOUR DIRTY TRICKS ON ME. P.S. THE SALARY YOU OFFERED ME WITH NO SICKNESS BENEFIT AND A PALTRY OLD AGE PENSION TO LOOK FORWARD TO WAS SCANDALOUS, TO SAY THE LEAST. C.
C.'

Herr Gustaffson had read the note in a voice trembling with indignation. Now he looked at the crooks, his eyes damp with wounded pride and dignity.

'Can you imagine anyone could be so base, so mean?' he asked. 'This man, Cauliflower Charlie, in whom I put my trust, who had my confidence. This man, whom I tried to educate and instruct because I believed in his honesty and integrity — this man, whom I protected from the malevolent and spiteful attacks of Scotland Yard and towards whom I behaved with the utmost generosity, paying him as much as £3 a week; this man has had the nerve to betray us all — you, my dear associates, and myself! Here stand all of us, honest, benevolent men, waiting for the delivery of Agaton Sax, which would bring every one of us tens of thousands of pounds — and he sneaks in here bent on one thing only: to insult us all. Who does he think he is? Does he really believe that he can frighten me, Herr Gustaffson? How pathetic! I'll tell you this: within twenty-four hours we'll have . . .'

Herr Gustaffson's stirring peroration was suddenly interrupted by a series of excited raps on the door. He broke off in the middle of his sentence.

'Who's there?' he called sharply.

A voice from outside the door answered: 'It's me Finn the Forger, and him, Hairy Herbert. We've found him!'

'What are you talking about? Who have you found?'

'Well, I don't know really.'

'You blithering idiots! Have you gone raving mad? You must know who you've found.'

'No we don't, sir. He was sort of snooping round here, so we thought we'd better grab him, sir.'

'For Heaven's sake bring him in, you blundering nincompoops, and let's have a look at him! Open up for them,' he ordered the two guards at the door.

Finn the Forger and Hairy Herbert entered the garage. Between them stood Lispington, proud, straight-backed and handcuffed. There was so much dignified anger in his eyes that even Herr Gustaffson, an uncommonly cool customer, almost flinched as he saw him. But his weakness lasted only a few seconds; he pulled himself together and stared arrogantly at his victim, knowing that he could intimidate almost any stranger merely by looking him straight in the eye.



But this time something extraordinary happened. Herr Gustaffson, till now so sure of the hypnotic power of his gaze, suddenly seemed to stagger, as if Lispington's brave, undaunted stare had pierced right through his heart. He groped for support, and Lispington's first words hit him like a whiplash.

'You haven't a chance in a million, Herr Gustaffson,' he announced, his voice icy with scorn.

Herr Gustaffson bit his lower lip, then managed to straighten himself. There was even the ghost of a smile on his thin lips as he answered:

'I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you from the start, Lispington. You see, we've not only got *you* — but Agaton Sax as well. So who's not got a chance in a million — you or me?'

Not a muscle moved in Lispington's expressionless face as he retorted:

'You ranting bully, do you think you can fool me with a ludicrous tall story like that? I know you haven't got Agaton Sax, I know that Cauliflower Charlie has led you up the garden path, I know that *he* has kidnapped Agaton Sax. But don't worry, Herr Gustaffson, we are tracking him down.'

Agaton Sax could both see and hear what was going on, and he was full of admiration for his friend's composure, courage and presence of mind. 'Excellent,' he murmured, 'Lispington is playing his cards just right; how he's come on these last years.'

But as far as the meaning of the extraordinary message Lispington had sent him just

before the crooks arrived; well, he still had no idea of the answer to that.

Once again, Herr Gustaffson seemed to be losing his grip on events: it was obvious that everyone in the garage had been impressed by Lispington's effortless defiance, which to Herr Gustaffson had looked like cold-blooded effrontery, so it was all the more important that he should lose no tune, not only in recovering lost ground but, more positively, in regaining the upper hand. 'You really take the biscuit, Inspector Lispington,' he retorted scornfully. 'But what's the point of all this fiddle-faddle? You seem to have forgotten that we've got you. Now, what do you say to that? Don't you see that I've got you in my power? If you can't now you soon will, because I've got a surprise for you. Not just an ordinary surprise, but one that will give you the shock of your life.'

Herr Gustaffson's eyes suddenly flashed triumphantly and he started shouting orders to his assistants. Agaton Sax was aware of an uncomfortable feeling of imminent danger. As a rule he found it easy to anticipate the next move in any opponent's game, and could work out a counter-plan accordingly. But Herr Gustaffson's outburst was so sudden it seemed to have come to him in a flash, to be inspired, one of those rare ideas that just drop unexpectedly into your mind and which you know will work. That was what made Agaton Sax so uneasy. A thousand thoughts whirled through his brain — but not one of them really satisfied him. With increasing discomfort he watched the sad spectacle of Lispington being frog-marched out to the car, while Herr Gustaffson gathered six of the crooks round him and gave them whispered instructions. Three or four minutes later all the crooks had left.

Agaton Sax dashed out through the door at the back of the garage and made his way to the car he and Lispington had hidden. He could see the rear lights of the other car glowing in the darkness, so he waited a few seconds before starting his engine, for fear that the crooks might hear it. It took courage to delay, for he knew that he had reached a vital stage in the operation. If he lost touch with Herr Gustaffson and his gang now he might not be able to trace them again. But Agaton Sax's great strength lay in his confidence in his own ability. Not for one single moment did he allow himself to think they would slip through his fingers. He chose precisely the moment to start his car which would enable him to keep the right distance behind them. When their car stopped before pulling out into the main road, he slowed down, drove in among the trees and switched off his lights, until it was safe to follow without arousing suspicion. Once on the main road, he had no difficulty in keeping them in sight.

Two years ago, before Herr Gustaffson had been jailed for the fourth time, Agaton Sax had known where his headquarters were, but it was most unlikely that he would still be using the same premises. After a while it became clear that the crooks were heading for either Hampstead on St John's Wood, which confirmed Agaton Sax's own guess; he knew that in the past Herr Gustaffson had had several very dubious business associates in that part of London, and it was quite natural that he should choose to return to an area he knew so well.

Suddenly Agaton Sax realized that the part of Hampstead they were coming to was very familiar. He had visited it many times before, and always at night. That pub, for example, The Old Cat and Fiddle, was a favourite haunt of Lispington's. They'd often been there together, and Lispington had stood his friend many a lemonade or ginger-ale to celebrate the destruction of some dangerous international gang. Just up the hill from the pub was the garage where Lispington was in the habit of getting his number plates changed in a hurry when it was essential to the success of a mission that his car should not be spotted. He had an understanding with the mechanics so that at a special signal from him they would fit new plates with the speed and precision of a racing team at a pit stop.

A little further on, Agaton Sax mused, just round the next corner was a narrow left-hand turning that led to Lisington's own house. It was an old house, very beautiful, and with a large garden at the back in which Lisington, a keen amateur smith, had built and equipped a small smithy.

At that moment the crooks' car turned left. Agaton Sax gasped: what on earth was happening? They drove straight up the narrow lane, their headlights piercing the darkness and creating fantastic shadows in the branches of the oak trees which formed an avenue to the house. Agaton Sax slowed down, realizing that if he followed the other car too closely they couldn't fail to spot him.

It was almost unbelievable — was Herr Gustaffson really intending to take Lisington to his own home — and, if so, why? [000]



The crooks drew up outside Lisington's house, and tumbled out with their prisoner. As they went up the steps and forced Lisington to produce his key, Agaton Sax noticed that a light at the back of the house — the only light — was suddenly put out.

This is extraordinary, he murmured to himself, frowning. He had an intense dislike of things which he did not immediately understand; they disturbed the sense of superiority which served him so well in all his encounters. Now there were *two* things he did not understand: one, why was Herr Gustaffson taking his prisoner to his own house, and two, why had the second floor light at the back of the house gone out just as the crooks arrived? As far as Agaton Sax knew, Lisington lived alone, and it was hardly likely that he would have a visitor when he himself was away.

Agaton Sax hid his car behind a broken down shed at the side of the road, and tiptoeing cautiously between the trees, approached the back garden. The moon went behind the clouds and a chill gust of wind shook the leaves of the oaks.

Suddenly he stopped, turned round, and peered into the darkness between the trees. He had heard something, but he wasn't sure what, nor where it came from.

Now — there it was again — once more he swung round and listened intently, still without understanding. What was it he could hear? For a brief fraction of a second he felt a chill down his spine, *for he could have sworn that what he had heard was someone whispering his name.*

But there was no one to be seen. He switched on the small but powerful electric torch which he always carried, and let its light play among the trees. Nothing. He stood absolutely motionless, his brain working feverishly on this extraordinary problem.

'It's impossible,' he murmured. '*And yet I heard it!*'

Hardly had he spoken than he jumped again, and this time swung round so suddenly that he almost lost his balance.

'*Agaton Sax!*'

The whispering voice was there — quite clear, quite distinct — intense, insistently urgent. It was not a figment of his highly-charged imagination, it was not a hallucination — it was a real voice, as real as any voice could be.

5 Enter Andreas Kark

'Yes,' Agaton Sax whispered back into the empty darkness of the trees, his voice trembling with excitement. 'Yes, I'm here. Who are you? Where are you? Answer me.'

'Agaton Sax,' said the voice again, 'can you really hear me?'

'Yes, I can!'

'Thank goodness!'

'Good Heavens! I know that voice,' exclaimed Agaton Sax with immense relief. 'Where on earth are you, man? I can't see you.'

'I'm probably in your pocket, Agaton.'

'In my . . . Oh, how stupid of me!' cried Agaton Sax. 'My walkie-talkie.'

To his annoyance he found he was trembling. For a moment, until he remembered the walkie-talkie, he had really thought he was in danger.

'I must be getting gaga,' he muttered furiously.

'What was that? What did you say?' Lispington's voice enquired sharply from his right pocket.

'Nothing, old man,' said Agaton Sax. 'Tell me, are you all right?'

'Fairly all right.'

'But where are you — what happened to you? I mean, why have they brought you to your own home? What are they doing here, I mean?'

'I've a theory about that, Agaton, but first I must give you some vital information. Are you still there?'

[OBI]



'Yes, yes, I'm here all right.'

'Fine, you see it's urgent. They have locked me up in my coat cupboard. Now, listen carefully, this is what I want to tell you, and it's important. I have here in my house . . .'

. . . And that was all. The walkie-talkie went dead.

'Lispington!' whispered Agaton Sax desperately. 'Lispington! I can't hear you. For Heaven's sake, go on. Say anything, anything! Can you hear *me*? Repeat your message, say it over and over again — maybe I'll be able to pick it up.'

He listened, and adjusted the walkie-talkie with expert fingers; after all he had designed it himself and personally supervised its manufacture. But there was no trace of Lispington's voice nor of any other sound.

What was the important message Lispington had been so anxious to give him? Agaton Sax racked his brains, trying out possible and even impossible theories; but with no success.

By this time he had almost reached the bottom of the garden, and he saw the fence only a few yards ahead. Most of the windows in the house were lit now: at least three of the rooms on the ground floor seemed to be occupied by the crooks; he could see their shadows moving behind the curtains.

What ought he to do? He could sneak back to his car, drive to the nearest phone box and call Scotland Yard. But if he did he would be running the risk that while he was away the whole gang might clear out, taking their prisoner with them, and once they had disappeared it might be days or even weeks before he and Scotland Yard could lay hands on them again.

While he was turning these matters over in his mind, he became aware of a new sound coming from quite near where he was standing. At first he thought it was only a creature, some nocturnal bird or a frog hopping through the grass, but then he noticed that the noise had a metallic ring about it. He listened intently, and tried in vain to see through the darkness.

There it was again. He was puzzled and irritated. For the second time in a few minutes he was listening to a noise he could not identify; particularly irritating because he had always prided himself, with justification, on having no equal, the world over, when it came to identifying unusual sounds. He had recorded many of the sounds which had come his way, and his collection was the envy of police forces in every continent. He could distinguish the footsteps of an English crook from those of a French one, and he had no difficulty in identifying a make of car from the purr of its engine. That was why, as he heard the curious noise for the third time, he felt not only thoroughly vexed, but puzzled.

Now something else was happening. The sound had acquired an additional note — or was there yet another sound? This time he was sure he heard a faint groan, so faint it was like a deep sigh, as well as the original strange metallic noise. Could it be that there was a man hiding behind that bush? But who? And why?

'I can't stand being in the dark any longer,' he muttered impatiently. 'I must find out what's making this noise — whatever the cost.'

He looked carefully at the windows to make sure that none of the crooks was keeping watch from them, then took out his torch and let its beam play over the grass a few yards in front of him.

Suddenly he heard, through the dark, a voice so feeble that it was little more than a

whisper, but distinct enough for him to be certain it was not Lispington.

'Who's there?' it asked, and the accent was not English.

'Why do you ask?' whispered Agaton Sax. 'What are you doing in Inspector Lispington's garden?'

'I'm stuck,' said the voice.

'You're stuck?' echoed Agaton Sax, utterly amazed.

'What on earth are you stuck in?'

'Not in, *on*,' said the voice. 'On a heavy piece of rail lying on the ground outside Inspector Lispington's smithy.'

He's raving, thought Agaton Sax. Aloud, he asked: 'What do you mean, *on* a piece of rail? You can't be stuck *on* something, you know. You can be stuck *in* something, or perhaps *between* one thing and another, but not *on* something, you know. I can tell you are not English, and I think you are probably unfamiliar with the meaning of certain English prepositions? You obviously mean *in* or *between*. Which?'

'Neither, sir, I said *on*, because I am *on*. You see, I'm magnetic.'

Magnetic! The man in the dark was magnetic! Good heavens! There's only one man in the world who's magnetic, and I know who he is, thought Agaton Sax.

Aloud he asked softly, 'Which bit of you is magnetic, sir? Pray tell me. Are you magnetic all over? Is it your head? Your hair? Your right thumb?'

'No, sir,' answered the voice, in a tone that indicated it was anxious to please. 'Not my hair or anything like that. It's my right shoe that's magnetic. That's why I'm stuck *on* a large piece of rail.'

Agaton Sax was dumbfounded. He was silent for a moment, then managed to pull himself together and whisper, 'Then you must be Andreas Kark, sir.'

'Yes, sir, I am,' answered the voice eagerly. 'And you, sir . . . can it be possible . . . can it be so fortunate that you are none other than my very good friend . . .'

' . . . Agaton Sax! Yes, indeed, Andreas, I am Agaton Sax. What a surprise for both of us. Tell me — are you all right — I mean apart from being stuck?'

'Yes, yes, I'm fine, thank you, fine but stuck.'

'But why are you stuck? I mean, what brought you here in the middle of the night? Wait a minute — I've got it — you must have made a dash for it when the crooks arrived, or . . . ?'

'You're right, Agaton, that's exactly what did happen.'

'Then it was you who put the light out in the room on the second floor?'

'Yes.'

'But what were you doing in Lispington's house? I didn't even know you were in England, let alone here. He never told me.'

'Well it was like this. You see, I arrived yesterday from my own country, Brosnia, and went straight to Scotland Yard and told Lispington my story. He asked me to be his guest,

so here I am, or was, when . . .'

'Wait a minute,' Agaton Sax interrupted him. 'You said you told him your story. What story? Did something happen to you — before tonight, I mean?'

'Oh dear me, yes, Agaton, many things have happened. I don't really know where to begin, I'm sure.'

'Never mind. It'll keep. What I really want to know is what happened half an hour ago.'

'Inspector Lispington very kindly gave me a key to the house, as he lives alone and I wanted to have a little nap before dinner. After I had had my nap I went into the kitchen to make myself a sandwich, Mr Lispington having been so kind as to tell me to help myself while I was on my own. After that, I went back to my room on the second floor to watch a television programme, but just as I was about to switch on the set, I saw a car driving up to the gate. Six men tumbled out of the car, pushing Inspector Lispington between them and treating him disgracefully. Naturally, I realized immediately that they were crooks and that their plan would be to kidnap both me and Inspector Lispington. Besides, I recognized Herr Gustaffson among them, and if there was ever a dangerous villain it was he. Don't you agree, Agaton?'

'I do indeed,' murmured Agaton Sax. Then added impatiently, 'But please do go on.'

'Well, I wondered what would be the best thing to do. I had no doubt that they would rush straight upstairs to get me, so I switched off the light and crawled out of the window. There's a drainpipe at the back of the house, and having been an acrobat in a circus before I turned to atomic research and inventing, sliding down it was no problem. Incidentally, the drainpipe was metal, and my magnetic right shoe was of great help to me in hanging on. Well, they didn't see me, and I made my way across the back garden until I got to Lispington's smithy where I thought I might hide. But that was very stupid of me, because the smithy is full of iron. First I got stuck in a huge old cauldron which he plans to turn into two gigantic cigarette cases. Then I got caught on the invention he is working on at the moment — an umbrella which sends but sound and light signals every time you forget it. I managed to free myself from those two obstacles, as I had my special demagnetizing gadget in my pocket. But then this damned piece of rail caught me, and the gears, on my demagnetizing gadget jammed, so I couldn't get free. You can imagine how happy I was when I realized that you were Agaton Sax.'

'Well, it is indeed a most happy coincidence,' agreed Agaton Sax fervently.

His heart warmed as he thought about this excellent man, a quiet, unassuming Brosnian, a great genius, and yet so humble that he was almost capable of knocking at the door of his own flat before going in. A great genius? Yes, he was that all right! He had invented a silent explosive, and the research he had done in the field of nuclear physics was renowned and admired in scientific circles all over the world. An amateur, he had achieved more important results than most professionals. In spite of this, he remained so likeable and unassuming that no one envied him his success.¹

'But tell me, dear Agaton,' he went on, 'what brings you here?'

'Lispington and I got Herr Gustaffson, and his gang cornered,' explained Agaton Sax, 'but unfortunately we got separated and. they took Lispington off. I followed their car. Presumably Herr Gustaffson decided that there could be no better place to hide Inspector Lispington than in his own house?'

'But,' objected Andreas Kark, 'what about tomorrow morning? When Lispington

doesn't turn up at his office, surely Scotland Yard will send a squad here?'

'Yes, I'm sure they will, but I am also sure that by then the crooks will have taken him to another hiding place.'

'What do you think they plan to do to him?' asked Kark, a note of fear in his voice.

'They will treat him well,' said Agaton Sax. 'They won't use any violence. But they will keep him until . . .'

' . . . Until what?' asked Andreas Kark.

'Well,' said Agaton Sax, slowly, 'up to ten minutes ago, that is until I met you, I was sure that this was just an ordinary kidnapping. But now I am beginning to wonder if I'm not up against something even more serious — both kidnapping and . . .'

'And?' Andreas Kark looked at Agaton Sax in silence for a moment.

'You mean . . .?'

'I mean,' said Agaton Sax emphatically, 'that you, Andreas Kark, are the key to this mystery. Tell me all you know — but quickly.'

Andreas Kark sighed.

'Of course, Agaton,' he said, 'I never intended to conceal anything from you. On the contrary—I came to London with a view to getting help from both you and Lispington. But you see, Lispington didn't give me time to tell him the real object of my visit: he said we'd talk about that in peace and quiet tonight. And then, well, he never came back — until now, as a prisoner.'

Andreas Kark broke off and gestured towards his right foot. 'I'd feel happier if I were demagnetized,' he said simply.

In less than a minute Agaton Sax had fixed the jammed gears of the demagnetizer and set his friend free. Andreas Kark rubbed his right ankle with great relief.

'Ah, Agaton,' he said, 'there's nothing like not being stuck. Now I'll tell you my story. But first, you must promise to believe every bit of it, unbelievable though it may seem.'

'I do,' promised Agaton Sax solemnly. 'Karotakana-thossano perperetogalimornia "h".' (This, of course, is Brosnian, and means: — I swear by the Spirit of the mighty mountains of Brosnia.)

He knew Andreas Kark to be a trustworthy and reliable man, and moreover, he had no doubt at all that only a matter of supreme importance would cause his friend to leave Brosnia and come to London.

'Ten months ago,' Andreas Kark began in his slow, soft voice, 'I was at my desk, working on a technical problem. As you know, I have a house in the Brosnian mountains, where I can work on my research in peace and quiet, undisturbed by traffic or by inquisitive journalists or, for that matter, by embarrassing bits of metal, on which I am apt to get stuck if my attention wanders or I go out without my demagnetizer. The day had been very hot, and the evening was sultry, with leaden coloured thunderclouds building up over the mountains. As darkness fell, I experienced a growing Sense of approaching danger, I don't know why, but perhaps because I knew I was nearing the end of a series of extremely important experiments which would probably result in my being able to build an entirely fume-free diesel engine. You, Agaton, will realize the significance of that achievement, and understand my excitement as it became clear to me that I had reached

my goal. Only a few practical problems remained, chief among them ignition. It is while an engine is actually being fired that the most noxious fumes escape into the air; I was quite confident, however, that I could solve these problems within a fortnight.'

'But what you are telling me would revolutionize the whole car industry,' broke in Agaton Sax.

'Yes, indeed,' Andreas Kark agreed. 'So you can easily imagine that I had often wondered what would happen to me if a gang of crooks, internationally organized, got wind of my plans. Now, as I said, on this particular evening I was sitting at my desk. It is near the window, and from it I can enjoy a magnificent view of rolling green foothills rising gently to the distant sweep of a wild, towering range of mountain crags. Night was falling, and with it came the storm that had threatened all day. Over and over again the sky was lit by sheets of lightning, but the storm was too far away for thunder to be heard.'

[101]



Then, as I sat by the window, the storm came nearer, thunder rumbled round the

hills, and I got up to close an open window. From what I have told you so far, you may have got the impression that my experiments were still at the paper stage. Not so. In fact, I had already built a small machine that could reduce the fumes from a diesel engine to practically nothing, and without any loss of energy. I had placed this machine on a table near one of the open windows.

'I have told you that during my evening my feeling my machine or my designs. In the event, something quite different happened. As I was about to close the window shut the window hastily and sank into the chair at the desk. The thunder clap had been followed by a deep silence, or so I thought at first. But as I sat there with my head in my hands, trying to calm down, I heard a faint, but very curious, sound. At first I thought it was my own cars humming as a result of the thunder, because it resembled the sort of ringing you get in your ears after a loud bang, but soon I realized that the sound was not coming from inside my head, but from outside it. What could it be?'

6 The Light Machine

Andreas Kark paused, slowly mopping his forehead as he recalled that awful night. Agaton Sax sat absolutely still, watching his friend's face and noticing with interest that it showed no fear; on the contrary, a faint, but happy smile was playing on Andreas Kark's lips.

'Well,' he went on, 'you've probably guessed already what the noise was. No? It was the machine. *It had started all by itself.* And now it continued running as steadily and reliably as a good old clock ticks away the seconds and the minutes. I examined it very carefully. I was flabbergasted. How could the machine have started? I *knew* that the fuel tank was empty, I *knew* I had used it up and not refilled it. Could somebody else have filled it? With trembling hands I took the lid off the tank. It was empty. There was not one single drop of fuel in it. And yet the machine continued to run.'

Still Agaton Sax sat silent, still he watched his friend closely as he listened to this fantastic story. He nodded solemnly, to show how great his interest was, and Andreas Kark went on:

'It was so extraordinary that at first I thought I might be dreaming. But then, after a few seconds' thought, I realized what was happening. You see, Agaton, I had on more than one occasion toyed with the idea of building a machine that would run *on light alone* — and now, suddenly, I realized that this was exactly what I had done! My machine needed no fuel — not even to start! The only thing it needed to get started was a powerful flash of light —after that, it would go on running on the light as weak as that coming from the lamp on my desk! The powerful flash of light? That had been the flash of lightning, of course.

I turned to the lamp and switched it off, plunging the room in darkness. Almost at once, the machine stopped! I switched on every lamp in the room — and the machine started again! It's almost impossible to tell you, my dear Agaton, how excited I was. I realized at once that if what I had just seen should prove to be a fact, and not just a product of my over-stimulated imagination, then its effects would be shattering. I settled down and made a simple calculations based on the fact that the machine . itself was very small, and the light it had worked on feeble. The results indicated that the machine was capable of producing considerable power. If I increased the light input, and made certain minor alterations to the design, I would have an engine as powerful as that of a small saloon car. 'I have never lived through a longer night,' he went on. 'You are probably wondering why. Shouldn't I have been so happy that I slept like a child? No, I wasn't. Why? Because there was one vital question still to be answered: *would the machine operate on daylight as well as on electric light?* And that question could only be answered when dawn broke over the mountains, and the first rays of light penetrated the gloom.

I put out my light, and the machine stopped. Then I waited in the darkness. Oh, those long, interminable hours! It was 22.53, and dawn would come at 5.11. When the first pale streaks of light showed on the horizon, my eyes were riveted on the machine, and I listened greedily for the longed for sound to break the silence of that lonely dawn. 'But I was bitterly disappointed. The machine did not start. There was no sign of did my best to encourage it. Had it all been a dream? But that was impossible. I knew the machine had worked perfectly for more than three hours, until I stopped it myself. Then why this deathly silence?

'Suddenly I remembered— and it shows how disturbed I was that I did not think of it

before — the lightning! It was that sudden, blinding dash of light that had started the machine. Evidently it needed some sort of electric push to get it going. So, I thought, what if I get a powerful torch and shine it directly into the machine, perhaps: that will start it. I tried — and I succeeded! Since, then I have tested the engine for several hours everyday, and I can honestly say, Agaton, that this must be the most important invention since James Watt's steam engine! Just consider what it means. We can get as much energy as we need just from daylight; not from the sun's rays, but from ordinary daylight any day, sunny, cloudy, foggy or rainy, all the year rOund. To heat an ordinary block of flats you would need only a small machine costing not, more than, say, £1,000. To keep going a factory employing a hundred workers, your machine would probably cost about £1,500. And you would need no oil, no electricity, no fuel of any kind — everything would be free and clean and practically noiseless. Do you understand what I am telling you?

Agaton Sax did. He nodded solemnly. This was by far the most important piece of news he had. ever heard. Compared to this new device Andreas Kark's previous invention, an explosive that went off silently2, paled into insignificance.

If Andreas Kark's machine, or the designs had drawn for it, ever got into the greedy hands of Herr Gustaffson or Mosca it would mean that a gang of unscrupulous, callous crooks would have unlimited power at their disposal, they would be able to threaten any honest private citizen they chose, and even blackmail governments. The plan to kidnap Andreas Kark was, Agaton Sax realized, one of the most appalling crimes he had ever encountered. How lucky that his Brosnian friend had managed to escape — and how lucky that he, Agaton Sax, had met him in Lisington's back garden.

But luck alone never put anyone behind bars, and Agaton Sax knew there was still a lot more that he needed to know before he could arrest the villains.

'How do Mosca and Herr Gustaffson know about your invention?' he asked Andreas.

'There was an article, very well-informed,, in the Brosnian press about an extremely important invention that I was said to be working on. Only after it appeared my Instant Cautioner woke me up in the middle of the night . . .'

'Your what?' interrupted Agaton Sax, who had thought until that moment that he knew everything there was to know about secret safety devices.

'My electro-magnetic alarm system. It's an invention of my own. There is an area completely surrounding. the house which is sensitive to electro-magnetism, so that when anyone comes within twenty-five yards of the door, a linked system of tiny flashing red bulbs, and carefully pitched bells is put into operation throughout the house. The only disadvantage of this otherwise excellent arrangement is that I to be extremely careful when entering or leaving the house not to get caught up in it myself. . .'

'I did get stuck once, when I was returning, home rather late one night, and had forgotten my demagnetizer. I could not move, and had to stand there for fourteen and a half minutes before a policeman spotted me and I was able to show him how to set me free again.'

'Very interesting,' said Agaton Sax, 'but you were telling me about being woken up in the middle of the night.' 'That's right, so I was. Well, it was twice actually, Once at 2.49 and once at 3.i4. The bells woke me up. I jumped out of bed and pressed a secret button, which triggered the firing mechanism of five small guns I've installed in the garden — they fire blanks into the air (the Brosnian Minister of Guns and Ammunition granted me a licence for this). I can assure you, Agaton, that there's no more efficient system if you want to warn off unwelcome intruders, or crooks like Herr Gustaffson and Mosca. On both

occasions they scattered in all directions like scared rabbits. I enjoyed the sight, but it didn't for a moment tempt me to under-estimate their skill and daring, and I went on taking every possible precaution.'

'And you were very wise to do so.' Agaton Sax nodded approvingly. 'What measures did you take?'

'I thought that even if they didn't succeed in stealing the light machine itself, it would be bad enough if they stole the blueprints and secret formulas. So I made five copies of the blueprints, together with a list of the one hundred and fourteen principles of physics on which the invention is based, and I made each one wrong in a different way.'

'What do you mean, wrong, Andreas?'

'Well, the five different blueprints looked reasonably enough like a design for a light machine, but each one had one very serious mistake in a vital stage. In the same way, the formulas I devised from the principles of physics would have looked sound enough at first glance even to an expert in light and electronics — but on closer examination the whole thing would be seen to be no more than sheer nonsense. Mind you, it would have taken a Nobel Prize winner to see through my little frauds at an early stage in the examination of the documents, so any crook who stole them would be scratching his head for months and months before he realized that he had been fooled.'

[100]



'What did you do with the inaccurate blueprints and formulas?' asked Agaton Sax.

'I'll tell you exactly what happened, Agaton, and that will answer your question. I knew for certain that Herr Gustaffson was spying on me day and night, and I knew that this could not go on. The Brosnian police are, as you know, absolutely useless, so I decided to take the law into my own hands. I put the false blueprints and formulas into a big envelope addressed to the Minister of Industrial Development, sealed it, and marked it URGENT AND PERSONAL in red. I also put a letter to the Minister in the envelope saying that I had the pleasure of sending him the blueprints and formulas for my new invention.

'I knew that they were following me all the time, so I took it to a letter-box in a rather lonely spot some five hundred yards from my house, with the idea that when they saw me put the letter in the box, they would break it open as soon as I left.

'Everything worked out exactly as I had foreseen. Mosca and his men robbed the letter-box, and found my letter to the Minister. Mosca believed that he now possessed one of the most valuable documents in the world I had no doubt what my next move was to be. I had to go to London and draw up an agreement with *Smith, Smith, and Smith Ltd*, the only firm in the world that could produce my machine on a large scale. Then I had to contact you and Lisington, for as soon as Mosca realized that I'd fooled him, I knew he would stop at nothing to get hold of either my machine or myself, and you and Lisington are the only people in the world who can protect me. A few hours ago, I put a telephone call through to you in Bykoping, but your aunt answered, and told me that you had just left for London. She said she couldn't go on talking because she was in a great hurry.'

'In a great hurry?' asked Agaton anxiously. 'Why?'

'She said she, too, was flying to London.'

'My aunt?' exclaimed Agaton Sax, turning pale. 'Now? Today?'

'Yes. As soon as she told me, she said goodbye and hung up' Agaton Sax sat very silent, trying to penetrate this mystery. After a few minutes, he said: 'We must try and get in touch with Lisington again.' He put the miniature microphone to his lips and whistled the three short notes which were the signal he and Lisington used. But there was no reply. Andreas Kark looked at him anxiously.

'What do we do now? Call for reinforcements from Scotland Yard?'

Agaton Sax didn't answer. He thought for a few moments, then said: 'Yes, I think you are right. We can't wait much longer. I'll give it another ten minutes; then, if we don't hear from Lisington, we'll call Scotland Yard.'

As you will remember, as soon as Lisington had told Agaton Sax that he was locked up in his own coat cupboard, their radio link had been broken. But what had happened to Lisington *before* he was locked up? It is essential that the true story of what really happened should now be told, for certain rumours have been put about which give a false picture of this important part of the mystery.

We must start by going back to the garage at Colindale where Herr Gustaffson had expected to take delivery of Agaton Sax. When Lisington saw the two crooks approaching the shed where he was hiding, he retired to the furthest corner and watched them through a hole in the wall. He was just telling Agaton Sax about their approach when one of them made a dash for the shed and cannoned into it. Lisington jumped, and in doing so, caused an unexpected disaster of which he was the victim.

Earlier in the evening, in a fit of high spirits, he had decided to play a trick on Agaton Sax, which had occurred to him when he was looking at the tiny microphone of the walkie-talkie Agaton Sax had given him. It was no bigger than a button, and he thought how amusing it would be to put the microphone in his mouth, and see whether it would make his voice sound different. It did, and he had very much enjoyed his friend's anxious questions about why his voice sounded different. He was even more pleased with his idea when he realized what an appropriate hiding place for a microphone his mouth was when crooks were prowling round. But when one of the crooks appeared to be launching a violent attack on the shed, Lisington got such a shock that he swallowed the microphone. The crook stopped dead, an angry expression on his face. In fact, he hadn't had the slightest intention of attacking a hidden enemy inside, but merely of killing a wasp which

he had spotted on the door handle. He made a swipe at it, missed it, and was now nursing a bruised hand.

Having swallowed the microphone, Lisington stood paralyzed, breathing hard. Then, pulling himself together, he coughed violently, and to his immense relief found the microphone back in his mouth. He quickly took it out and put it in his pocket. Poor Lisington, his joke had misfired and he had to pay a high price for it. The crooks could not fail to hear his cough; they drew their revolvers and in only a few moments Lisington was a prisoner before Herr Gustaffson. It had come as a great shock to him when Herr Gustaffson had revealed that he was already aware of Andreas Kark's presence in his home. It was a clear indication of the skill of his enemies' formidable intelligence network. Evidently Gustaffson or his agents had followed Andreas Kark on his journey from Brosnia to London. But why had they bothered? It could only be because they knew of his invention, had guessed he would hand it over to Lisington for safe-keeping and wanted to lay hands on it at whatever cost.

By the time the crooks had looked Lisington up in his own coat cupboard on the ground floor, the question that was uppermost in his mind was: what would happen to Andreas Kark? He could hear almost everything the crooks who had assembled in Lisington's living room were saying. Five of them rushed upstairs to look for Andreas Kark, and Lisington heard them making a terrible noise as they searched the three bedrooms, tearing doors open, pulling out drawers and unrolling carpets in their vain search for the Brosnian gentleman whose name they thought was Andreas Carp. At last, they gave up and hurtled downstairs, only to be greeted scornfully by Herr Gustaffson, who gave them no mercy because they had failed to bring him Andreas Kark. An attitude which, in the circumstances, was entirely unjustified. He then banged a thick volume furiously on the massive oak table in order to achieve silence (it was actually one of Lisington's favourite books, 1,475 pages long and entitled INTERNATIONAL CROOKS: HOW TO CATCH THEM AND HAVING DONE SO HOW TO HOLD ON TO THEM).

'Silence, you fools,' he thundered. 'Did you find the machine?'
'No sir,' declared the men with one accord.

'Did you search everywhere, you sleepy nincompoops?'

[000]



'Yes, and the only thing we found was a letter on the bedside table in Lisington's bedroom. Here it is, sir.'

Herr Gustaffson snatched the slip of paper. Through the keyhole, Lisington could see Herr Gustaffson smooth it out, for it was badly creased. There was a gleam of pure joy in Lisington's eyes, for he knew what the letter said. In fact, he and Andreas Kark had written it themselves in the hopes that it would fall into Gustaffson's hands. He had never thought, though, that he would have the good fortune of watching his victim read it:

Dear Mr Lisington, I am so glad you were able to lock up my machine up in the vaults at Scotland Yard. I would have been so nervous if I had been forced to keep it here in the room you have so hospitably offered me. I am going out shopping now, and hope I won't get stuck on the bus. I prefer the underground really, but the buses are much less magnetic, I don't know why. Probably it is because the trains run on electricity — unless being double-deckers your buses have no magnetism, it is interesting to speculate about such matters. I am glad you are going to put a guard on the house tomorrow.

Yours Truly, Andreas Kark

Herr Gustaffson rage. He tore the letter to pieces, shouting at the top of his voice. 'In Scotland Yard's vaults! The blasted crook, he'll pay for this! But wait a minute. We've got Lisington. It'll be the easiest thing in the world to get the machine in exchange for Lisington. Then they can deposit him in the vaults instead of the machine. Best place for him! Ha! ha! ha! ha!'

In the darkness of the coat cupboard, Lisington clenched his fists. What an intolerable scoundrel Herr Gustaffson was. He took the walkie-talkie out of his pocket and brought it to his mouth, whispering:

'Agaton! Can you hear me? Good. I have fooled them! What are you planning now? Over.'

In the back garden Agaton Sax and Andreas could hardly believe that this long wait for news of Lisington was over. Agaton Sax nodded as he listened to Lisington's report on the effect of the letter, and Andreas Kark rubbed his hands together, overjoyed at the success of the plan he and Lisington had worked out.

Agaton told Lisington about Andreas Kark's fortunate rescue, and Lisington explained why he had suddenly sounded as if he were delivering messages in secret code.

Then Agaton Sax raised the matter of what to do next. 'Lisington,' he said, 'I think it's about time I called your colleagues at Scotland Yard. Over.'

There was no answer. Agaton Sax called his friend again. At last, Lisington replied, his voice sounding rather thick. 'Not just yet, Agaton. Over.'

'But this is just the right time to get the lot. Over.'

There was another pause before Lisington answered. And now he sounded definitely irritated, if not angry: 'No, Agaton, I don't want any reinforcements now. Over.'

'But why not? Over.'

'It might lead to complications, said Lisington curtly. 'Over.'

Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark exchanged puzzled glances. But before Agaton Sax had time to ask Lisington what he meant, the latter whispered excitedly: 'Wait a minute, Agaton! The phone is ringing. Let me listen, and I'll see what I can make of their conversation.'

Lisington pricked up his ears. Herr Gustaffson had dashed to the phone and snatched up the receiver.

'Yes, who is it?'

There was a brief silence. Herr Gustaffson's lips curled into a hard smile. He said: 'So it's you, at last. You haven't had time to call me before? Well, of course I know what a busy crook you are, Mosca. But you got my message all right, otherwise you wouldn't know that I am in Lisington's house, would you? All right, as you say. We were to co-operate, that was our deal, wasn't it? *You* were to send me £10,000, genuine money, and *I* was to take care of Lisington and Agaton Sax. That was our deal, wasn't it, you double-crosser? Don't interrupt me. Don't try to distort the truth! You tried to diddle me — you never sent me £10,000 in genuine money. You didn't even send me £10 in counterfeit money. I've got Lisington and I've got Andreas Kark and what have you got? What's that? You've got the blueprints for Andreas Kark's light ma-

chine, you say? So what . . . How do I know you've got them? I've got to take your word for it? Ha! ha! ha! You make me laugh, Mosca! Well, there's an easy way to prove it.

You come over here with the blueprints and I'll show you that I've got Lispington, Andreas Kark and Agaton Sax. You see? We've both got something equally valuable, so maybe we can make a fair and honest deal. Yes, I said *honest*.'

There was a brief silence, broken now and then by a word or two from Herr Gustaffson. At last he wound up the conversation.

'Very well, Mosca, let me repeat, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding between us. You will come to Lispington's house at 4.30. You will bring with you Andreas Kark's blueprints for the light machine and five of your assistants, and I will show you Lispington, Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark. I also have five assistants with me. I'm sure we can do business together, because both of us will be negotiating from a position of strength. Right. So long, crook and colleague, we'll see you and your rascals here at 4.30, that is, six hours from now.'

Herr Gustaffson put down the receiver and rubbed his hands together. He ordered one of the crooks to take two bottles of champagne-from Lispington's refrigerator. He solemnly filled the glasses, and the crooks drank their favourite toast, to Success and Money.

[08]



At the same time Lispington gave Agaton Sax a detailed account of the phone call, stressing that Herr Gustaffson's lie about having Agaton Sax in his possession was a grave risk. Agaton agreed; he listened carefully to everything Lispington had to say, asked a question or two, and then commented drily that he would enjoy making Gustaffson regret his impertinence. Then, after a few moments' reflection, he added: 'Listen, Lispington, we must reduce the number of Herr. Gustaffson's gang. At least three of them must be removed. Leave it to me, I'll ring Herr Gustaffson.'

Having received Lispington's approval of his plan, he left Andreas Kark and hurried away to a nearby phone box. He dialled Lispington's number and waited eagerly for the crook's reply.

Herr Gustaffson seemed to have regained his usual icy calm. He was standing by the window, his hands folded behind his back, laughing silently to himself. Now, and then he took a draught of champagne, his spirits rising as he drank. He was becoming more and more cheerful. Now he laughed aloud. Suddenly the phone rang again. He put down his glass and answered.

'Yes, who is it?'

Agaton Sax, whose skill in imitating voices is superior to that of any other man or woman, had now assumed the typically husky, slow voice of Cauliflower Charlie. He asked: 'Isn't that you, sir? Herr Gustaffson, I mean?'

'Who are you?' snarled Herr Gustaffson.

'I'm Cauliflower Charlie — you don't mean to say you don't recognize me?'

'What the devil do you mean by waking people up in the middle Of the night, you treacherous little rat?'

'Tut, tut, Herr Gustaffson, sir, remember, I have Agaton Sax.'

'What do you want, you miserable little traitor?' roared Herr Gustaffson, trembling with rage and humiliation.

'I want you to listen to reason, Herr Gustaffson. You see, it's no use foaming at the mouth, is it? If you stop hurling insults at me, or rather into my right ear, I'll tell you a big secret and make you a first-class offer. Does it surprise you to know that I know that Mosca will be visiting you in the early hours?'

'You reptile, what are you trying to say? How can you possibly know about *my* visitors?'

'I heard your conversation a few minutes,' said Agaton Sax.

'What?' exploded Herr Gustaffson. 'Are you tapping the telephone wires now, you slimy coward? Don't you know there's a law against that?' (On hearing this, Lispington, in his coat cupboard, nodded energetically.)

'Never mind about that, Herr Gustaffson,' replied Agaton Sax, still using Cauliflower Charlie's voice. "You see, I've just told Mosca I Would like to join his company, and he offered me an immediate increase of 75p per week and a much better pension scheme. But I don't trust him for a moment. On the other hand, I know he has Andreas Kark's blueprints for the light machine, and anybody who can lay hands on those will soon be richer than Matthew Silly.'

'Matthew who?' shouted Herr Gustaffson; 'Oh, you ignorant fool, the rich man's name was, Methuselah, not Matthew Silly! Did you sleep-walk through-your years at school?'

'I'm sorry, sir. I may be ignorant, but, I do know some. things, and I know that Mosca will try to cheat you. So if you take my advice, send three men into the front with instructions to see what Mosca and his men are up to when they arrive. Your men can hide behind the hedge by the gate.'

For a few seconds the sounds reaching Agaton Sax through the telephone seemed to indicate that Herr Gustaffson was having difficulty in chewing something particularly tough and nasty. Then he gulped, and answered:

'And how do I know that *you* are not trying to do *me*? You just did, remember, when you sneaked off with Agaton Sax.'

'I should forget that if I were you, sir. Can you give me one good reason why I should bother to warn you against Mosca if I were trying to do you? But if you don't trust me, just sit there and wait for him, and you'll see what will happen to you and your gang. And remember this: I've got Agaton Sax, so of the three of us —Mosca, you and me — I am by far the strongest. Which means that I can pick which of you two *I* want to co-operate with — and that happens to be you and not that disastrous old has-been, Julius Mosca. Got it?'

'Well,' said Herr Gustaffson, changing his tactics and adopting a nonchalant tone, 'what's your bid? I mean after I've taken care of Mosca.'

'My bid is that the moment Mosca and his gang arrive at Lisington's house, I call Scotland Yard and tell them where they can lay hands on both you and Mosca and. . . '

'Me?' echoed Herr Gustaffson, infuriated. 'Are you absolutely crazy? I thought you . . . '

'Wait a minute,' went on Agaton Sax in Cauliflower Charlie's voice. 'That's what I'll tell Scotland Yard — but when the cops arrive fifteen minutes later — who will they find there, safely locked up? Mosca, of course, and his men — and Lisington. But *you* will have disappeared with the blueprints. You see?'

'I see. And after that?'

'Well, after that we'll have another chat on the phone and talk business. I mean, with you having the blueprints and me having Agaton Sax we must come to an understanding, musn't we?'

'Yes,' agreed Herr Gustaffson, slowly stroking his chin while his brain worked feverishly to see if it could detect a trap hidden in the words he had just heard from Cauliflower Charlie (as he believed). But he came to the conclusion that he and Cauliflower Charlie would make a good team against Mosca, so he said: 'Very well, Charlie, I'll send three men out to spy on Mosca and his gang when they arrive. You call Scotland Yard, but just before you do it, give me a ring to warn me, so that I can clear out in time.'

Agaton Sax rubbed his hands. He was sure his plan would be successful, and so was Lisington, who got a short report from Agaton Sax as soon as Herr Gustaffson had hung up.

'We have a few hours to wait, so I suggest we all take a little nap,' said Agaton Sax.

It was a very warm summer's night. Andreas Kark had already stretched himself out on the grass, and Agaton Sax followed his example. Lisington, on the other hand, silently cursed the day he had thrown four old pillows out of the coat cupboard. They had been there for years and he thought he would never need them. Now he bitterly regretted their soft if dilapidated comfort as he sat on the hard floor in the dark.

After only a few minutes, Agaton Sax was sound asleep. He slept easily, knowing that although his sleep was deep, any suspicious sound would wake him immediately.

And yet it was with a little shudder of fear that he suddenly heard Andreas Kark's voice near his left ear. It said in an agitated whisper: 'Agaton, my friend, a thought has struck me!'

Agaton Sax sat up, wide awake, his blue eyes as alert as if he had slept for eight hours, rather than eight minutes.

'What is it, Andreas?'

'My light machine . . . '

'Yes? What about it?'

'Did I tell you where I hid it?'

'No, you didn't. All I know is that it's in Lisington's house.'

'That's right.'

'But Herr Gustaffson hasn't found it!'

'No, you see it's camouflaged.'

'How?'

It's built in, so to speak, in a grandfather clock. One of those rare and very elegant grandfather clocks that were designed and built in two separate pieces. As my machine, by a happy coincidence, is also built in two parts, this clock provides the ideal hiding place for it.'

'And where is the grandfather clock?'

'By the window in the living room where Herr Gustaffson and his men are waiting for Mosca.'

7 A Bitter Dispute

'What a catastrophe!' Agaton Sax sat silent for a minute or two. Then he went on: 'And you're afraid the machine may start of its own accord as soon as the sunrises?'

'It may, and it may not.'

'How do you mean?'

'I mean that daylight alone is probably not enough to *set it going*.'

'But *if* it starts — will Herr Gustaffson notice it?'

'He can't fail to notice it. For one thing, all the dial lamps will light up, and for another, it ticks, remember, a steady, regular tick rather like that of a grandfather clock.'

'So let's hope it won't work,' said Agaton Sax with a sigh.

By now it was just after 2.00. The night, was pitch black, and they fell asleep again, Agaton care to set the miniature alarm on Sax having first taken his watch for 3.45.

At almost the same time as Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark stirred, Herr Gustaffson woke. He roused his five associates and sent three of them out into the garden, where they were to watch for the arrival of Mosca and his men and then keep them under close observation.

Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark had already crept cautiously along the rhododendron hedge up to the gate. They saw the door open, then shut, and they heard the voices of the three crooks as they walked slowly down the path to the gate.

'I hate the dark,' said one of them. 'I never feel safe — when I can't see anything. There could even be crooks hiding behind those trees over there.'

'I remember once, I saw a headless ghost,' said another.

'He stood by the gate staring at me, and I . . . '

'How could he stare at you if he hadn't got a head, you stupid oaf,' mocked the third crook.

'Well, he was probably carrying his head under his arm,' went on the second. 'How should I know? But I know that he was staring at me. And I said: "Who are you? Why are you staring at me? Why don't you go back where you came from?"'

'Stop it!' broke in the third man, his voice trembling with fear. 'Shut up! We don't want to hear any of your old ghost stories. Why do you want to put the wind up us with a lot of rubbish that isn't true?'

'I don't like this,' said the first crook, going back to the subject of their present assignment. 'Why should we stand here acting as targets for that crook, Mosca, and his treacherous mob?'

'You're right,' agreed the second man. 'Why did Herr Gustaffson send us out here in the first place? Is he trying to get rid of us?'

Agaton Sax made a signal to his friend Andreas Kark. Then he leapt to his feet, switched on his powerful electric torch and directed into the eyes of the three astonished

men, blinding them. Then, with all the authority at his command, he thundered: 'Listen! This is Agaton Sax! You don't stand a chance. Two revolvers are pointing straight at you. Do you hear? *I am Agaton Sax*. Don't move. Stay where you are and listen very carefully. I'll give you a sporting chance against Scotland Yard. Take it or leave it. get away from here as quick as you can and I, Agaton Sax, promise to leave you alone. But I can't promise you anything on behalf of Scotland Yard. Get away, and don't show up again, understand? But if you don't scam now, I'll handcuff you and deliver you to Scotland Yard, they'll be here within half an hour. Well, what do you say?'

The three men huddled together and held a hasty, confused and agitated conversation. It ended quite abruptly when all three whispered: 'Yes, thank you, your honour; yes, we'll scam. Goodbye, thank you, sir — your Highness — we'll never go back to Herr Gustaffson again.'

And without more ado, they all vanished into thin air. Agaton Sax rubbed his hands together and smiled happily. 'Now there are only two of them left — and Herr Gustaffson, of course. But I'm sure we'll be equal to him as well.'

He called Lispington, who had evidently fallen asleep, for he answered:

'Hallo! Hallo! This is Inspector Lispington speaking.'

'Can you hear me?'

'Yes, but didn't my secretary tell you, I'm not in at the moment?'

Agaton Sax smiled benevolently. 'Lispington,' he said, 'you are in your own coat cupboard, not in your office. You've just woken up, and this is Agaton Sax speaking.'

'What? Oh, yes, of course, Agaton. I must have dozed off for a second. How's everything going?'

'Just line. Andreas Kark and I have despatched three of Herr Gustaffson's men, and now we're waiting for Mosca and his lot. But, really, Lispington, isn't it time we called Scotland Yard and asked for a dozen hand-picked assistants? Then we can arrest Herr Gustaffson and Mosca at one and the same time.'

'Absolutely not, Agaton! That will be quite unnecessary. I can get out of here in less than half an hour, and do the job myself.'

'What?' exclaimed Agaton Sax. 'How will you manage that?'

'There is a door at the back of the coat cupboard which leads to a small bedroom. It is locked on the outside, but I can open it with my penknife.'

'Lispington, listen,' said Agaton Sax in a voice that left Andreas Kark in no doubt about his seriousness, 'you musn't do anything of the sort. They'll be bound to hear you, and if they do they'll make things very unpleasant, not only for you, but for us as well.'

'Don't fret,' said Lispington cockily, 'just leave it to me.'

A few minutes later they noticed that the first glimmers of light were visible on the horizon. The next half hour would be decisive. Would Andreas Kark's machine start by itself When the sun had chased the last of the darkness from the sky?

Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark waited, desperately anxious. The one thing that comforted them was that Agaton Sax had succeeded in persuading Lispington to put off his escape attempt until after they knew for certain whether or not the light machine would

work.

Now at least it was broad daylight. Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark heaved a deep, unanimous sigh of relief. Their vigil was over.

But, alas, a bitter surprise awaited them.

Herr Gustaffson was pacing up and down the room, waiting for his enemy, Julius Mosca. He was already regretting that he had agreed to make a deal with such a treacherous scoundrel. How could anyone trust a dyed-in-the-wool fraud like Mosca? He would betray his own mother if it suited him. Herr Gustaffson cursed his folly.

He had stopped by the grandfather clock, and checked the time against his watch. It was five minutes past four. In another twenty or twenty-five minutes, Mosca would arrive. Herr Gustaffson was confident that the three armed men who were on guard in the garden would be up to any tricks Mosca could play. But nonetheless, he was nervous, Lisington could see that, as he watched him through the keyhole.

'My hat, that man is close to a breakdown,' he murmured.

Lisington, whose *sang-froid* was legendary, was rarely nervous. He was fascinated by Herr Gustaffson's display of tension. First he patted his pockets, feeling for his cigarettes, then his lighter eluded him. When he finally succeeded in bringing the two together, his hands were trembling so much that he had difficulty in lighting the cigarette and achieving the first deep pull he needed to steady his nerves.

Suddenly, he started, a muscle in his lean, alert face twitched. He stared ahead of him with terror in his eyes.

'What's that?' he asked hoarsely, his voice no more than a whisper.

'What's what, sir?' said one of the crooks who was with him. 'The grandfather clock,' stammered Herr Gustaffson.

'What about the grandfather clock, sir?'

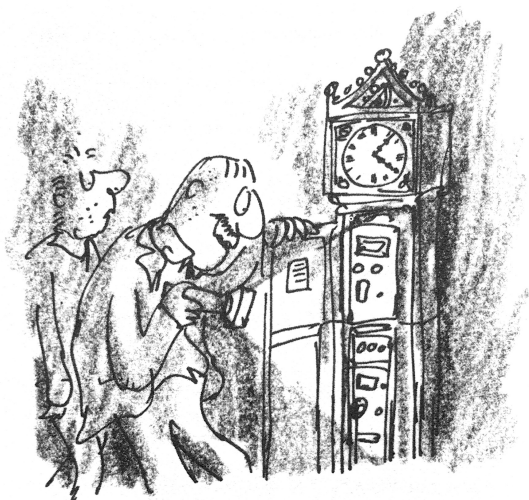
'Can't you hear or are you half asleep? Listen. The grandfather clock has started up! And look at those lamps.'

He went right up to the clock, and examined it carefully. What was happening? He knew he was looking at something vitally important. If only he could. . .

'What sort of a grandfather clock is this?' he mused.

'Why does it need a panel of lights inside it? Have you ever before seen a clock equipped with an instrument panel, and with lights that begin to flash the moment it starts? And why has it started anyway? Clocks don't have engines. They tick! And nobody wound it, did they?'

He threw himself at the clock, hovering in front of it like a hawk over its prey. Lisington's voice trembled as he described the terrible scene to Agaton Sax, who listened with great concern and repeated everything to Andreas Kark.



They were in a highly dangerous situation. The door of the grandfather clock was in two halves, like a stable door, and Herr Gustaffson flung them both open, then flashed his torch into the darkness of the interior. An expression of sheer joy lit his face, as he murmured: 'If this is a grandfather clock, I am my grandfather's granny! This is Andreas Kark's secret light machine — and I am the most powerful man in the world!' He was so overwhelmed by his discovery that he seemed to stagger But, even in his triumph, he was professional enough to realize that he had not a moment to lose if he wanted to keep this precious jewel to himself.

There could be no doubt what he would do next, and Agaton Sax was the first to grasp what would happen: Herr Gustaffson would take the clock, put it in his car and carry it off to his secret headquarters, breaking the agreement he had just made with Mosca. Of what value were Mosca's blueprints compared with the machine itself? Herr Gustaffson had no need of blueprints, no need of Lispington, now that he had Andreas Kark's fantastic light machine he had all that he needed to make him a multi-millionaire.

He issued a few curt orders to the two men still with him; and Lispington passed them on to Agaton Sax from his; coat cupboard. Agaton nodded.

'Thanks, Lispington. I'll take care of him as he goes through the gate with your grandfather clock. Don't worry — you'll be free in a few minutes.'

Agaton Sax's plan was doubtless well thought out, but as it happened his optimism was ill-founded. Not for the first time in his adventurous life something unexpected happened — something which took both Herr Gustaffson and Agaton Sax by surprise, to say the least.

Just as Herr Gustaffson was in the act of telling his men to carry the grandfather clock out, the front door was flung open. Herr Gustaffson, who was standing by the window with his back to the door, turned round and shouted:

'Who's that?'

Agaton Sax knew. He had seen them arrive — Mosca and eight of his men in two cars

which glided silently up to the gate and disgorged their occupants in a matter of seconds. It was a perfectly organized operation — swift, silent, and efficient. The nine men dashed up the path, through the front door, and the next moment Herr Gustaffson and his two men were looking straight down the barrels of nine revolvers.

'Stick 'em up,' commanded Mosca, showing his elegant teeth in a broad, expansive and arrogant smile. 'Good to meet you again, Herr Gustaffson?'

Herr Gustaffson's instinctive reaction to Mosca's entry had been to reach for the revolver in his hip pocket, but acknowledging that for the time being he was at Mosca's mercy, he dropped his hand to his side and shrugged his shoulders. Then he smiled, almost as broadly as his triumphant opponent.

There was a moment's silence. Herr Gustaffson broke it as he commented coldly:

'Once a crook always a crook, eh Mosca? Trust you to betray a colleague.'

'How right you are,' laughed Mosca. 'Set a thief to catch a thief, I always say. You see, I knew you'd be planning to cheat me, so I decided to put my faith in the old maxim that attack is the best method of defence and take you by surprise. Well, it worked.'

[001]



Only a mile or two from here who should we meet but three of your men; on foot and in a blue funk. They were so keen to get away as

quickly as possible that they tried to hitch a lift from us before they realized who we were. As soon as they recognized me they changed their minds, and I let them go. Cowards like that are no good to me.'

Lispington was giving Agaton Sax a running commentary on this extraordinary encounter, and enjoying Gustaffson's discomfort. Then, suddenly, he heard a remark which shocked him into silence.

'Just tell me where you've stowed that half-witted copper, will you? Then I can take him off with me.'

'Are you mad?' shouted Herr Gustaffson indignantly. 'Worthless though he may be, he's my cop. You're acting like a sneak thief, Mosca, and that's what you are. There's not an honest crook in the five continents who'll do business with you after this, I promise you that.'

'Stop talking nonsense,' shouted Mosca, 'and give us the key to the room where you've hidden that feeble-minded, overgrown, so-called detective.'

Agaton Sax was alarmed by the silence. He tapped the microphone with his finger, whistled into it and kept repeating in an urgent whisper: 'Lispington. Where are you? Can you hear me? Answer me. Over.'

'Yes, Agaton, I can hear you, but it's so damnably insulting that I can't take it any longer. Over.'

'What can't you me. Don't do anything rash, Lispington?

'Rash! I'll shake him till his teeth rattle. I'll tear him limb from limb How dare he! I won't be bullied by a . . .'

'Who's bullying you?' asked Agaton Sax, mystified by Lispington's outburst.

'Both of them, but first and foremost, Mosca. He's going to . . . Oh dear! I've . . . I'm sorry, Agaton.'

Lispington switched off his microphone and hid it quickly in his pocket. A key was turning in the lock.

Five minutes later Mosca and his rushed out of the house. They had Lispington and the last two of Herr Gustaffson's gang between them.

Herr Gustaffson himself remained in the house. In fact, he was locked in the coat cupboard, hand-cuffed and ruminating on the ups and downs of his dangerous profession. He was down now, all right, but, being by nature an optimist, he took heart from the knowledge that not for one moment had Mosca suspected that Andreas Kark's light machine was hidden in the grandfather clock.

This thought was so comforting that Herr Gustaffson laughed out loud, his guffaws rising to a crescendo the like of which had never been heard before in the discrete cupboard in which Lispington hung his well-tailored coats.

8 The Chase Is On

When Agaton Sax saw Mosca and his men hurtle through the front door and hustle Lisington into their car he guessed at once what had happened. Calculating that Herr Gustaffson would have replaced Lisington as the occupant of the coat cupboard, he decided he could do no harm for the time being and signalled to Andreas Kark. Together they ran to Gustaffson's car and prepared to follow the crooks.

The car was not only an excellent one, but Agaton Sax was familiar with the controls. And yet, when he tried to start it, it behaved so strangely that he was completely at a loss. In the first place, there seemed to be something wrong with the ignition; then, when the engine did start, it was with such a violent jerk they felt as if they were riding broncos rather than sitting in a car. Then it stopped again, as suddenly as it had started, and a wisp of smoke emerged from the gear-box.

Andreas Kark turned pale, then he murmured faintly: 'Oh dear, it may be me again . . .

'What?' said Agaton Sax.

'I'm so sorry, Agaton, but it may be me.'

'May be what?' asked Agaton absent-mindedly — he was concentrating on trying to fire the engine.

'You remember, I'm magnetic,' said Andreas Kark apologetically. 'This is not the first time I have accidentally prevented a car from starting. If you could de-magnetize my right shoe again, maybe the engine would start.'

'Ah, how thoughtless of me!' exclaimed Agaton Sax. It took him only a few seconds to demagnetize Andreas Kark, and then the engine started at a touch, and ticked over happily.

But alas, the delay, short though it was, was enough to give Mosca and his men the start they needed. Their car had gone, and there was not a chance in a million of catching up with it. After ten minutes' drive, Agaton Sax pulled up at a wayside pub, took out two cigars, one for Andreas and one for himself, and the two of them sat silently pulling away while the first few early morning travellers drove by in the rising mist which promised a line day.

'I say,' said Agaton Sax suddenly.

'I say,' said Andreas Kark at the same time.

'Go ahead,' said Agaton Sax.

'After you, Agaton.'

'It occurs to me, Andreas, that we may be making a serious mistake in calmly sitting here smoking. I don't believe Herr Gustaffson will be wasting his time in such an activity, do you? He's far too resolute. That's what makes him so dangerous.'

'Dear me, no. You mean he won't be letting time slip by while he's locked in Lisington's coat cupboard. Oh no.'

'If he's locked in the coat cupboard, and has not managed to escape,' said Agaton grimly. 'We'd better go back at once. I don't trust him.'

They drove back to Lispington's at terrific speed and hurried up the path to the front door. Once inside a dreadful shock awaited them.

'The clock! The grandfather clock! My light machine has gone,' wailed Andreas Kark, and Agaton Sax cursed his own negligence in leaving Herr Gustaffson alone for more than two minutes. There was no need to look for him in the coat cupboard; the prisoner had vanished into thin air, and the light machine had gone with him.

'Come on,' said Agaton Sax firmly, 'he can't have gotten far. I'm sure he's on his way back to Colindale — let's go and see.'

'But he hasn't got a car,' remarked Andreas Kark. The thought suddenly struck him as they drove out on to the main road.

'Let's make enquiries,' said Agaton Sax pulling up at the pub they had just left. 'Someone may have seen him.'

An old man who was cleaning glasses in the bar proved very ready to answer their questions.

'Oh yes, I saw him all right. A very nice gentleman he was, a bit foreign-looking, but very nice — and such a kind heart— he told me all about his grand-dad'

'His grand-dad?'

JOHN



'Yes, he was really attached to him. He had his grand dad's grandfather clock with him, because it badly needed repairing and he had promised the old man he would get it seen to. He thought he could carry it, but it was so old and heavy that he couldn't manage

it and called in here to ask if we could get a taxi for him. We called one, and when he thanked us he said his grandfather would be grateful to his dying day for the service we had rendered him.'

'What an interesting tale, sir, I'm sure he will,' agreed Agaton Sax, and he raised his black bowler hat, bid the old man farewell and drove off at a high speed.

'You know,' he said to Andreas, 'Herr Gustaffson may be a cool customer in some ways, but in others he's very emotional. For instance, he never forgives treachery. So at this moment, two things will be uppermost in his mind. First, he will have to find a safe hiding place for your light machine — priceless to him; and second, he won't rest until he has had his revenge on Mosca. He won't be content just to outwit him on this occasion, he will want to crush him, destroy him utterly, so that he will never again be a threat to his supremacy in the criminal world. After all, they both know the other is after your light machine, and both of them have, however unwillingly, agreed to co-operate if it means they can get the better of you. But of course neither of them seriously intended to co-operate with the other; both of them were bluffing. Now, at last, Herr Gustaffson has the upper hand. Our job is to see that neither gang is the winner. We must smash them both at once.'

'So where are we going now?' asked Andreas Kark. 'Back to the garage. I'm pretty sure Herr Gustaffson plans to hide your light machine there — but only for a twelve hours or so, until he has got rid of Mosca.'

They were approaching the area where the helicopter had landed.

'Look,' said Agaton Sax, slowing down and pointing ahead.

'Good gracious!' exclaimed Andreas Kark, 'it looks as though there are two helicopters on the field.'

Agaton Sax nodded silently, his brow furrowed in thought. It was a foggy morning, but nevertheless he could see quite clearly that another helicopter was standing there, and it was quite unexpected. Could the other helicopter belong to Mosca? But if so, why was it here? Mosca's men could not have possibly followed Herr Gustaffson.

'Agaton,' said Andreas Kark slowly, 'there's a light in the garage.'

'Yes, I noticed. I'm sure it must be Herr Gustaffson. He must have just arrived and will be hiding your machine.'

'Look! The light's gone out.'

So it had — and the garage stood dark and sinister against the slope with the trees behind it. Agaton Sax swept the area with his powerful binoculars, and caught a glimpse of a man hurrying away from the garage and disappearing among the trees.

'No, we're not going to follow him,' said Agaton Sax grimly in reply to Andreas Kark's question. 'You see, he has hidden the light machine in there. Let's go and get it.'

But once more the car refused to start. As Andreas Kark was already demagnetized, they knew there must be some other explanation for the engine's silence. Agaton Sax dived head first under the bonnet, Andreas Kark stood by his side, a worried expression on his friendly face. Suppose they didn't find his machine in the garage. Suppose it had gone for ever! No, he had to trust his old friend, Agaton Sax, he had to calm down and try not to get over-excited, because every time he let his nerves get the better of him, the magnetism in his right shoe increased in proportion, and that could prove dangerous in a situation like this.

'That's it,' said Agaton Sax at last, straightening his back and smiling with satisfaction. 'I've found the fault. Let's get to the garage.'

But hardly had he uttered those words than a terrifying roar came from the landing-field.

'Good God, the other helicopter's starting up!' exclaimed Agaton Sax, instinctively jumping into the car. 'We'd better follow it.'

But even as he spoke, he realized that finding the light machine was more important, and headed for the garage. A couple of minutes later they reached it, while the helicopter disappeared in the mist. They rushed to the garage and began a thorough search. After lifting up every tarpaulin, looking behind and under every piece of furniture (not forgetting the vintage car), and even prizing up loose floorboards, they stood up and looked at each other in silence. The light machine was not there.

Agaton Sax knew exactly what to do. He went back to the car and drove as fast as he could to the landing-field. They leapt aboard the helicopter they had landed in only three hours before, and three minutes later, Agaton Sax, having demagnetized Andreas Kark once again, took off just as the mist was clearing. 'Don't worry, my dear friend,' Agaton reassured

Andreas as they soared over Colindale, 'we'll catch them up – both of them. Herr Gustaffson and whoever the pilot of the other helicopter is. Believe me, I know what's going on. They're both looking for Mosca, and one of them has your light machine.'

'But surely you don't know where Mosca is?' Andreas Kark in amazement.

'Of course I do. I've known for a long time. In fact, I have a map of the part of London where he hides out all by my desk at home, with a red circle drawn round the spot where his headquarters are. I've shown the map to Aunt Matilda, so that she can join us if things get too difficult. She has a way with crooks, you know. And I've got a copy with me, thinking it might be useful. It won't take us more than fifteen minutes to get there.'

At this point we must leave our two friends, heading southeast at a steady speed through a cloudless sky, and pay a brief but dramatic visit to Scotland Yard.

There is, in that impressive and efficient organization, a special service, the name of which we are not allowed to reveal. We will call it SHH, which stands for Secret Hush-Hush. The only people from overseas who have ever been allowed to meet any of its personnel are Agaton Sax and the High Commissioner of Interpol (the International Police Force).

The control room of SHHIS manned night and day by four police officers of the highest possible calibre. Its function is to act as a sort of central clearing house for urgent messages, important communications and suspicious phone calls. The duty officers must, in fact, be prepared to cope with any emergency.

This particular night and the early hours of the morning had been unusually quiet. Very little had happened except by mistake. For instance, a telegram from a Miss Ogilvie reporting the disappearance of her cat should have gone to her local police station, and a phone call from a distressed fish-and-chip shop proprietor in Whitechapel requesting an urgent delivery of frying oil was quickly transferred to a more appropriate department. Otherwise, the night had been peaceful and the duty officer's chief

problem had been staying awake.

But at 5.15 everything changed. A telephone call came through which made the four men on duty feel rather uneasy. Inspector O'Brien picked up the receiver as it rang.

'Yes?'

'There' s a call for you, sir,' said the operator. 'A gentleman who calls himself Agaton Slacks, sir.'

'What does he want, love?' ,

'He says it's urgent. Something to do with Moscow, he says.'

'Moscow? Hm! Sounds very odd...Did you say Slacks?'

'Yes, sir, I think so.'

'Well, you'd better put him through.'

Inspector O'Brien put his hand over the mouthpiece and said to the other three: 'Ever heard of a fellow called Agaton Slacks?'

'No, must be a joke, I should think,' replied Inspector Scott. 'Someone with nothing better to do at five o'clock in the morning than pull your leg. But don't let him.' He looked up from his crossword. 'How many letters? Six? No. He's never cropped up in a crossword, either.'

'Wait a minute,' said Inspector Bradshaw. 'I wouldn't be so sure, though: Agaton Slacks? Funny. It sounds familiar to me in some way or other . . . '

'Of course it does,' broke in Inspector Sharp, obviously on to something. 'It's not Slacks — it's Sax. Agaton Sax — the super-sleuth from Sweden, you know. Take the call at once, for heaven's sake. If Agaton Sax calls at five o'clock in the morning you can bet it's important.'

'Right,' said O'Brien. 'Hello! Yes, Inspector O'Brien speaking. Who are you?'

'I am Agaton Sax. You know my name?'

'Of course, Mr Sax.'

'Do you recognize my voice?'

'Well. . . . ah. . . I'm afraid I . . . '

'We've never met, but you may take my word for it that if I say I am Agaton Sax, then I am Agaton Sax. Right?'

'Well, sir, you could say that, but you could just as easily say the reverse.'

'I'm afraid I don't understand what you're getting at. I am Agaton Sax, and if you want to prove it, put a call through to Inspector Lispington's home. There will be no answer. Why? Because he isn't there. And why isn't he there at five o'clock in the morning? Because he's in Northwood. What's he doing in Northwood at five o'clock in the morning? *He is a prisoner.* Do you hear me?'

'A prisoner? Inspector Lispington?' exclaimed Inspector O'Brien, and his face was ashen.

The other inspectors, who were all listening on the intercom, looked at each other in great consternation. 'He's just been kidnapped by Julius Mosca, who, as you know, is loose again. But I have tracked down that particular scoundrel, and if you listen carefully, I'll give you his full address. I suggest you send about twenty men to go and get him. Just north-west of Pinner Park there is a turning called Oaks Lane. Follow it to the far end and

you'll come to a narrow lane leading to an old manor house called *Four Oaks*. The house has been empty for several years, but recently Mosca rented it and set up his headquarters there. You'll have to get a move on if you want to free Lispington and grab Mosca and his gang. They won't be there long.'

'Thank you, Mr Sax, we're most obliged. I'll put twenty men on the job at once. You'll be on the spot when we arrive? Good.'

Five minutes later, Inspector O'Brien was on his way to Northwood. He had with him twenty fully-armed police sergeants in four swift cars.

But in the control room, Inspector Scott put down his pencil, looked up from his crossword, took two or three pulls at his pipe, then, knocking out the ashes, murmured to himself: 'Well now, I wonder . . . ' And while he was still thinking, the telephone rang again.

'Yes?'

'I'm sorry to bother you, sir, but we're getting a very garbled message. It was received in the radio room, but as they couldn't make head or tail of it, they put it through to me. I can't quite make out what it's all about, sir, but someone seems to be worried about his lost grandfather.'

'What's that?' said Inspector Scott sharply, 'A kidnapping, did you say?'

'I'm not sure, sir, the atmospheric is so bad that I can't really hear what he's saying. Will you take it, sir?'

'Put him through. Hello — yes — hello, this is Inspector Scott at Scotland Yard. Scott at Scotland Yard, yes — yes, of course I'm serious. Now, What's your problem?'

The voice was not badly distorted by atmospheric disturbances, but the speaker was such a hurry that he seemed to be speaking in half sentences. Nevertheless, Inspector Scott could tell from its sharp, authoritarian tone that it belonged to a man who was used to being obeyed: 'Hello? Are you there? I can't hear you. If are there . . . Listen . . . Important . . . You must . . .'

'I'm here all right,' said Inspector Scott patiently, 'and I am trying to listen to you. Please state your business as clearly as possible.'

'My business? I don't do business with you! I just want to tell you that I have the grandfather clock, and he can have it back as soon as I have found out where Agaton Sax is.'

'I'm sorry,' said Inspector Scott, relighting his pipe and puffing at it, 'but whose grandfather are you talking about? Agaton Sax's?'

'NO, you blockhead! Not a grandfather, a clock! I have the *clock*, and there's something fishy about it.'

'But what were you saying about Agaton Sax?'

'I said *I'm* going to find him, and I don't want you poking your nose into *my* business. But you can send twenty or so men along to the manor house if you like. It's called *Four Oaks*, but I can't think why. There are no oaks for miles around. It's a swindle. Send your men here. They're sure to pick up a roaming crook or two. Far too many about for far too long. And don't forget: I'll give you the clock, but not till I've found Agaton Sax. Goodbye.'

This was probably the most puzzling telephone call Inspector Scott had even received during the course of his long and honorable career at Scotland Yard. Scratching his head, he ordered another ten men to set out for *Four Oaks*, drumming into them that they must

keep a sharp look-out for a mysterious grandfather clock which might throw some light on this very curious case.



Hardly had he settled down and refilled his pipe, when the phone rang again.

'Yes? Inspector Scott.'

'There's a gentleman wants to talk to you, sir,' said the girl on the switchboard, 'but he won't give his name. Shall I put him through to you all the same?'

'Do that, will you, love? Hello — yes, Inspector Scott speaking. Who is it?'

'I am Agaton Sax.'

'Oh, hello again, Mr Sax . . . well?'

'Did you say "hello again", Inspector Scott?' asked the caller sharply.

'Yes, we were just talking to each other, weren't we, Mr Sax?' said Inspector Scott.

'I'm sorry, but we *weren't*. You have never heard my voice before, Inspector Scott.'

'And you say you are Mr Sax?'

'Of course I am. Who else should I be?'

There was silence. Then, slowly tapping his desk with the forefinger of his left hand, and with a cunning smile on his face, Inspector Scott asked: 'Do you know Inspector Flispington of Scotland Yard?'

'No, I don't,' replied the caller angrily. 'There has never been an Inspector Flispington at Scotland Yard. You must be referring to Inspector Lispington.'

'Quite — yes, I am,' said Inspector Scott. 'That was a little trap, to find out if you really are Agaton Sax. Now, what about Inspector Lispington's left foot?'

'Well, what about it?' retorted the caller. 'There's nothing the matter with Lispington's left foot. You must be thinking of his *right* foot.'

'All right, what about his right foot, then?' said Scott, but he was considerably more subdued by now. '

'His right foot,' said the voice, 'is slightly smaller than his left, which is perfectly normal. That is the reason why his right shoe is always too large. He has it made to match his left shoe, rather than fit his right foot, so that international criminals can't identify him by his footprints.'

'Extraordinary!' exclaimed Scott, overwhelmed with admiration. 'There are only three people in Scotland Yard who know about this, me, Inspector O'Brien and Lispington himself. So you must be Agaton Sax! But then . . . damn it all. . . the other man—the one who said he was you! He must be a crook.'

'Of course,' said Agaton Sax calmly, 'and I can tell you who he is: Herr Gustaffson. He wants you to do his work for him and catch his mortal enemy, Julius Mosca; that's why he phoned you, pretending to be me. Did he ask you to send some men to *Four Oaks*? Good. And you've done so? Splendid! When do you expect them to get there?'

'Within fifteen minutes.'

'Couldn't be better. You see, Inspector Scott, I have just landed near the manor house, and I have an excellent View of it from where I am now. But I've got to find Herr Gustaffson — he must be somewhere around, and he is the hub of this crooked wheel. Without him, nothing will roll for us, if you see what I mean.'

'I do indeed, Mr Sax. But tell me, are you in touch with Inspector Lispington at all?'

'I was just coming to that. You see, I *was* in touch with him, but unfortunately Herr Gustaffson managed to kidnap him, and I have no doubt that he's now a prisoner at *Four Oaks*, which means that at the moment he's Mosca's prisoner. It won't take us more than half an hour to free him, will it?'

'Absolutely not,' responded Inspector Scott eagerly. 'But there's one other thing that puzzles me, Mr Sax. Do you know anything about a grandfather who has lost a clock?'

'Ah, I know what you mean,' said Agaton Sax. 'You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick. What's happened is that Inspector Lispington has had his grandfather clock stolen. But who told you about the clock. Please tell me, I'm all ears!'

Inspector Scott told him about the mysterious voice.

'Aha,' murmured Agaton Sax. 'I see . . . And you say you couldn't decide whether it was a manor a woman who phoned you?'

'I agree it does. sound odd — but it did sound odd; the voice, that is.'

'Aha,' murmured Agaton Sax again. 'I think I can promise you, Inspector Scott, that it was a lady's voice you heard. I'll tell you more about it later, when we've got more time. To get back to our plan. I'll be waiting for your men near the track leading to *Four Oaks*. Cheerio, Inspector Scott — and don't worry.'

9 Mosca's Headquarters

Julius Mosca, one of the most crooked, deceitful and dangerous departmental managers in the organization A.C.U. (Amalgamated Crime Unlimited), was laughing silently to himself as he drove up the track leading to *Four Oaks*.

In the back of his car sat Inspector Lispington— proud, scornful, calm and fearless. On either side of him were wedged two of A.C.U.'s hefty deputy managers.

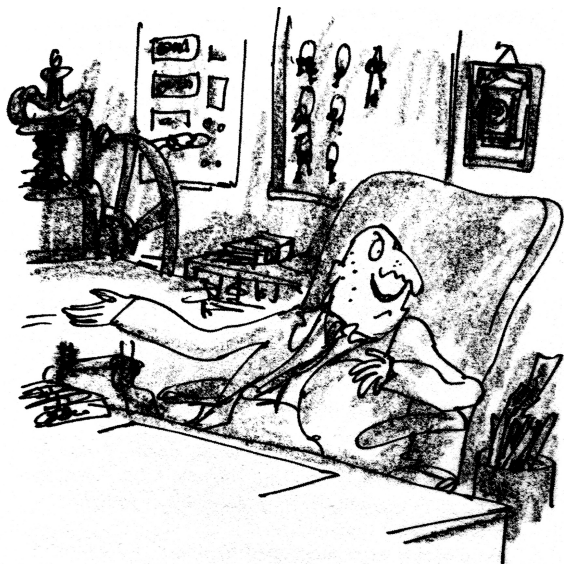
Four Oaks had once been a beautifully kept mansion, the house of three generations. of successful businessmen. But, the last generation to live in the house had been better at spending money than making it, with the result that it was now sadly dilapidated. Its final degradation was to fall into the hands of Julius Mosca. There were very good reasons why he himself couldn't live there (the State cared for him most of the time in solid, well-appointed prisons). But he let it to one of his employees, who lived peacefully there, and was, as far as the rest of the world knew, a skilled repairer of hot-air balloons. Whenever Mosca was free, he moved in and used the house as his headquarters. Lispington was taken to Mosca's private office, a sumptuous apartment in which he kept his famous (and useful) collection of printing presses for making counterfeit money, jemmies, skeleton keys and police uniforms obtained from a number of local forces. On the bookshelves were false passports forged identity cards and other useful documents.

Please take a chair, Inspector Lispington,' Mosca invited with mock courtesy, himself sinking into a luxurious arm-chair behind a magnificent mahogany desk.

'No thank you,' said Lispington, 'I have no wish to sit on one of your chairs. Though you will soon be sitting in one of ours.'

'You're a good actor, I'll grant you that,' scoffed Mosca, blowing thick cigar smoke out of his nostrils. But you can't fool me, Lispington, oh no, you can't fool me. I know I've got you beat. However, this is not the time to discuss my plans for your future; at the moment I've more important things to do.' He turned to the two men guarding the door. 'You there, Fumbling Bill and Heavy-Handed Herbert, take the prisoner to the green room and lock him in.'

[001]



Lispington was marched off to a room on the second floor, facing the large back garden. As soon as the two crooks had left him alone, locking the door behind them with a double turn of the key, Lispington set about investigating the possibilities for escape. Alas — there seemed to be none at all. The outside wall was a sheer drop, and had nothing on it that could offer a foot- or handhold — no drain-pipe or ivy, no nearby tree with branches that might stretch out a helping hand. Would it be possible to jump from the window? No, not with any hope of success. It was at least twelve feet up and the ground below was stony and dangerous.

He walked up and down the room, up and down, his hands behind his back.

'Damn it all,' he muttered, 'damn, damn, damn. If only Agaton had made that microphone a bit bigger so that I couldn't possibly have swallowed it, I wouldn't be here now. Still, I suppose he . . .'

His thoughts were interrupted by a sudden tinkling of broken glass, and he found himself staring down at a small, round object lying on the floor, only two feet from where he was standing, which had just been thrown through the window. He dashed to the window hoping to see who had thrown and thought he caught a glimpse of a man taking cover behind a tree. But if he was the man who had thrown the object, then he evidently didn't want Lispington to see him. He turned his attention to the object lying on the floor, bent down and picked it up. It was a small stone wrapped in a piece of paper. He unfolded the paper and read the brief message, which had obviously been scrawled by someone writing in great haste.

Lispington. Help is near. Look out of the window in four minutes, and make use of the means of escape I shall provide. A Friend.

What an extraordinary message. Who could this secret friend be, who didn't want to reveal his name? It couldn't be Agaton Sax. Herr Gustaffson? No. He was locked up in Lispington's own coat cupboard.

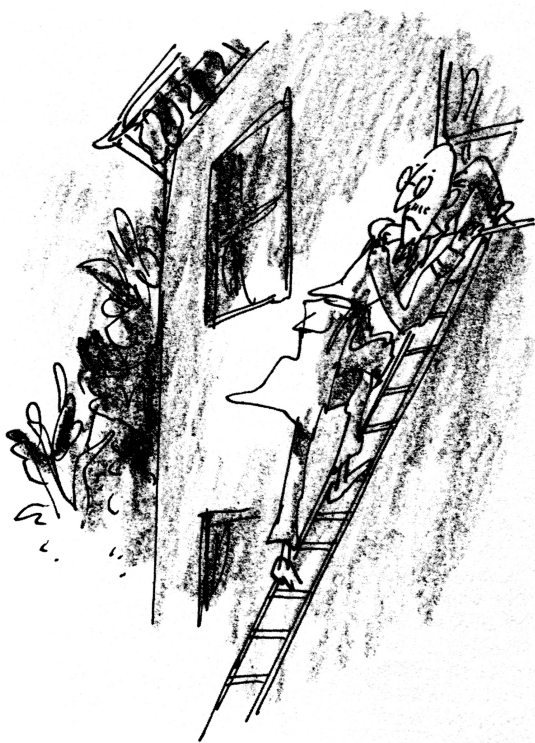
But suppose he'd managed to get out of the coat cupboard? Suppose he had found his way to Four Oaks? But why should Herr Gustaffson wish to help me? Lisington asked himself. Then, suddenly, the answer came to him in a flash: Herr Gustaffson wished to set him, Lisington, free, so that he, Lisington, could arrest Mosca and his gang.

'That's it. It's just as simple as that,' said Lisington out loud, considerably cheered by having found the solution to his problem.'

He looked at his watch, and counted every second with increasing excitement. Curious as he was to find out who the helper was, he forced himself not to go to the window until 240 seconds had passed.

Then he stole on tiptoe to the window and peered cautiously out. 'Good heavens!' he exclaimed, so amazed he forgot to whisper. The secret helper had, without a sound, managed to place a long, thin, metal ladder against the wall. Without a moment's hesitation, Lisington opened the window and climbed down. There was still no sign of anyone in the back garden, nor could he see any of the crooks. He guessed they would be having a board meeting (probably to decide his fate), and would anyway consider that to put guards at the front of the house would be sufficient.

OF



He crept along the wall until he reached the corner of the house, peered round and saw

two of the crooks sitting at a three-legged garden table-playing cards. It was so rickety that every time they threw their cards down it nearly toppled over. They were on the point of quarrelling, each one accusing the other of using marked cards, and Lispington was watching with interest when he heard a car start somewhere near the lane leading to the house. Only a few seconds later he heard a tremendous thundering roar coming from the far side of the back garden. The din was so deafening that for a moment he thought a jet plane must be revving up its engines in preparation for take-off. It was not a jet, of course, it was a helicopter, and it set off in the same direction as the car.

From now on, events took a dramatic turn. No sooner had Lispington seen the helicopter disappear beyond the tree-tops than the lane leading to *Four Oaks* suddenly seemed to be the scene of an important car rally. There were cars everywhere. The first squad from Scotland Yard was arriving, and Lispington, his heart swelling with justifiable pride, watched the cars racing up the lane sturdy, silent, shining cars carrying twenty, sturdy, alert police officers ready to leap out and take the villains by surprise. And so they did. Total panic seized the crooks as the policemen swarmed over the drive. Some tore their hair, some just stood and shook, others, in a last ditch stand, protested loudly that they were innocent tourists who had come to visit this picturesque old manor house.

Mosca himself tried to escape through the chimney, and might have succeeded had not one of his deputy directors conceived the same idea and got stuck. Finding no way out over the rooftop, Mosca tried his last resort. He rushed into his bedroom, and emerged a moment later dressed as a newspaper reporter.

'Always first on the spot and first with the news, that's my motto,' he laughed, brandishing his pencil and a notebook which, on closer inspection to be a book full of counterfeit cheques.

But Inspector O'Brien was not the man to be taken in by brash displays of this kind. Undeterred, he advanced on Mosca and said solemnly: 'I arrest you on a charge of having in your possession false cheques, and on suspicion of being, in all probability, one Julius Mosca, director of Amalgamated Crime Unlimited. It is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence against you.'

While all this was happening, something else was going on in the grounds of *Four Oaks*. A man had been hiding — behind a stack of logs for the last half hour, watching keenly all that was taking place. His spirits were evidently rising all the time, and now and then his mirth overcame him and he rocked with silent, but heartfelt, laughter. It could be said without exaggeration that when he saw the first police cars drive up the lane, his joy knew no bounds.

Immediately after the arrests had been made, the man made his way to a car which was parked a few yards from where he had been hiding. Once inside, he started the engine and moved away, driving at high speed in a north westerly direction. So eager was he to reach his destination that he failed to carry out the first rule in the Criminal Highway Code — when starting on a journey always look in your rear view mirror to make sure you are not being followed.

The man was Herr Gustaffson. As we already know, he had managed to escape from Lispington's coat cupboard, stolen the grandfather clock with Andreas Kark's light machine in it, succeeded in getting hold of a taxi, and then driven to the garage in Colindale where he had hidden the light machine. You will probably want to know why he chose to go to Colindale instead of taking his priceless booty out of the country. The answer lies in the vindictiveness of Herr Gustaffson's character. He had sworn a solemn oath that he would take his revenge on Mosca for double-crossing him, and make absolutely certain that Scotland Yard had him safely in custody. That is why he risked hiding the light machine in

the garage for a few hours, then going to Four Oaks and phoning Scotland Yard, telling them that he was Agaton Sax and suggesting that they should despatch a squad of police officers to pick up Mosca and his gang.

And now his plan had proved completely successful. Mosca was locked up, and the light machine was in the garage, waiting to be collected by him, Herr Gustaffson! This was a moment of such dazzling triumph that he transported into a world of delicious make-believe where happiness reigned. He had done it! He had pulled off the most fantastic crime in history. Through his own brilliant skill and cleverness, he had got possession of one of the most important inventions ever made by man: Andreas Kark's light machine. Not for him, any more, the petty crime bringing in a mere £250,000. Not for him the long hours of toil at the printing presses making counterfeit money. Oh no, he had found an oil well which gushed forth real money, genuine money — any amount of it, and all his own.

10 Aunt Matilda Takes a Hand

We must now return to our friend Lisington. As you will remember, his hopes were soaring "almost as high as Gustaffson's. At last, he was about to pull off his greatest coup. What a triumph! Hiding in the bushes, he had, watched his men take away Mosca and his gang, then spotted Herr Gustaffson slip away.

He ran to a police car parked in the lane, jumped in, and set off as fast as he could after the car which, rather to his surprise, was, still in sight. He pressed his foot down hard on the accelerator. Now the car was not more than a hundred yards ahead of him. Fortunately it was Sunday morning, so there was practically no traffic on the roads. Lisington was determined not to lose sight of him — in only five or ten minutes he would be snapping the handcuffs on Herr Gustaffson's wrists and bearing him in, triumph to his friend Agaton Sax!

At this moment the radio in the car came to life.

'Lisington?' it said.

'Yes, it is,' Lisington replied testily, 'but who are you and what do you want? I'm busy.'

'It's Agaton Sax,' came the reply. 'Now listen carefully. You are in danger of making a serious mistake. The car . . .'

'No, Agaton,' Lisington interrupted, 'I am not! Herr Gustaffson is in my grasp, but I can't talk now. I must concentrate. The situation is too critical for conversation, even with you.'

He switched off the radio and concentrated all his attention on the car in front. Suddenly it disappeared.

'Aha,' murmured Lisington, 'the road must turn to the right here, that's why he's out of sight.'

At that moment he heard the roar of a helicopter some distance away. When he reached the bend, he still could not see Herr Gustaffson's car, so he slowed down in order to give himself time to think. In front of him the road stretched out, absolutely straight, for at least a mile. Lisington came to the conclusion that Herr Gustaffson must have left the road and turned into a side turning so as to outwit his pursuer.

Almost immediately, he noticed just such a turning on the left, which led into a little wood. Without hesitation he turned into it, his teeth set, his hands firmly gripping the wheel.

He heard the roar overhead again, now much closer, than before. Could it be the helicopter? He stopped and looked up, but could see nothing. Could it be landing nearby? He started the car again.

There! He gasped as he saw the helicopter hovering only a few yards above the ground, and near a car that could only be Herr Gustaffson's. A rope ladder was lowered from the helicopter, and someone — undoubtedly Herr Gustaffson — swung himself on to the ladder, swarmed up it with the agility of an ape, and disappeared into the helicopter.

'Stop, you villains — stop! Stop in the name of the law. I am Inspector Lisington!' he shouted, and without a thought of danger he drove across the field at terrific speed, the car lurching horribly. But no one heard him, or took any notice if they did. The helicopter

climbed steeply, the rope ladder was pulled in, and the machine hovered over the field for a few seconds before off in the direction from which it had come.

'Damn!' said Lisington. 'Double damn!' But being a man of resolution, he was never one to give up easily, so he turned his car, drove back to the main road and managed, by skilful driving, to follow fairly closely behind the helicopter, which was following the road at a height of about a hundred and fifty feet.

Suddenly a thought occurred to Lisington which caused him to break out in a cold sweat. How can I follow the helicopter if it flies across country, he thought. As long as it follows the main road I can keep up with it — but what if it turns to the right or left?

No sooner thought than acted upon. He flicked on the speaker of his car radio and called Scotland Yard, issuing a series of orders. And now he had a stroke of luck. A police helicopter happened to be patrolling the neighbourhood, and it was immediately ordered to a spot where it could intercept Lisington's car and the crooks' helicopter.

'Just at the right moment,' said Lisington with relief, as the police helicopter came into sight, heading straight for the crooks' helicopter. 'I've done it! The greatest triumph of my life! I have caught Herr Gustaffson, and I planned the operation myself!' His radio was still on and he heard the police helicopter hail the other.

'Scotland Yard here. Can you hear us?'

'We hear you, yes,' answered Herr Gustaffson's man. 'What do you want?'

'We want you to land at once on the field below.'

'Why?'

'Why? Because it's an order from Scotland Yard!'

'Do you know who you are speaking to?' asked the voice from Herr Gustaffson's helicopter, a touch of irritation in its tone.

'Yes, to Herr Gustaffson,' came the reply.

'Herr Gustaffson, my foot! You are making a serious mistake, my dear chap. I am Agaton Sax.'

'Well, even if you are Agaton Sax,' said the policeman, 'You've still got Herr Gustaffson in there with you.'

'I'm afraid I haven't. But I will have very soon.'

'Don't try and fool us, Mr Sax — if you really are Mr Sax which I don't believe. You've been under observation for some time now, you see.'

'Under observation! Who's been observing me?'

'Inspector Lisington himself. It was gave the alarm.'

'What did he say he had seen?'

'He saw Herr Gustaffson climb up a rope ladder and enter your helicopter.'

'That's where you're wrong. Herr Gustaffson hasn't done any climbing practice round here lately.'

'This is no laughing matter and I refuse to discuss it with you any longer,' replied the police officer 'It's quite obvious that you are not Agaton Sax at all, and I order you to land immediately.'

'As you wish. I'm coming down now.'

In a moment of pure pleasure Lisington took his hands from the wheel and clasped them together. His car swerved and nearly left the road, but with the instinctive reaction of the trained driver, he straightened up, and, as the two helicopters landed, he came to a halt some ten yards away. 'Excellent! Well done!' he shouted as he ran up to the helicopters, eager to arrest Herr Gustaffson and the other crooks.

The four police officers were waiting for him. They shook hands, then watched the door of the other helicopter open and a man step down. They stared at him, silent, almost scared.

'The man was Agaton Sax.'

'Agaton!' exclaimed Lisington. 'You are the one who has caught Herr Gustaffson!'

'Unfortunately not, I was foiled in my attempt,' Agaton Sax grimly. 'I was following his car — I had him in view all the time, but then came this order from Scotland Yard, and being a law-abiding man, I had no choice but to give up the chase and land the helicopter.' Lisington mopped his forehead.

'But I saw Herr Gustaffson climb on board your helicopter with my own eyes,' he said. 'I'm sorry, but you didn't. You saw someone else,' said Agaton Sax wearily. 'I tried to warn you when you were in pursuit of Herr Gustaffson. I tried to tell you then that it was not who you thought, but *someone else*, but you wouldn't listen, you were so positive it was Herr Gustaffson.'

'But who. . . who was it then?' murmured Lisington faintly. 'The person in question is here now,' said Agaton Sax pointing to the helicopter.

Agaton Sax's Aunt Matilda stood in the doorway. She nodded at Lisington, her mouth pursed with disapproval. Lisington bowed stiffly, for he could never forget that once, when Aunt Matilda had mistaken him for a crook trying to break into Agaton Sax's house, she had emptied a yellow pail full of cold porridge over his head. But, always a gentleman, Lisington pulled himself together, bowed again, very politely and said:

'I now realize that it was you, Miss Sax, who erected the steel ladder in order to help me escape. I wish to express the sincere thanks of Scotland Yard and the entire British Government for this act of bravery.'

'That's all right, then. Splendid!' exclaimed Agaton Sax. 'And now we must be airborne again, all of us, you too, Lisington. Andreas Kark is waiting for us in the helicopter. We must waste no time in seizing Herr Gustaffson. He is not far away. You see, Aunt Matilda was following Herr Gustaffson, so you were also following him — only Aunt Matilda was between you.'



Two minutes later Agaton Sax's helicopter was in the air again, with Agaton himself at the controls and Lispington and Aunt Matilda both armed with binoculars.

Ignorant of the fact that Agaton Sax and the police were in-hot pursuit in helicopters, Herr Gustaffson was driving his car at breakneck speed in the direction of Colindale, where he intended to pick up the grandfather clock.

By this time he was in such a cheerful mood that as he bowled along he was singing at the top of his voice: 'With a million in my pocket I'll be flying like a rocket.' But suddenly he stopped singing.

Just as his dreams of power and wealth had reached such a height that he was almost delirious with happiness, a terrible noise assaulted his ears. He came down to earth with a bump and his face assumed its customary expression of cunning ruthlessness. He listened. The noise was being made by something in the air.

'Ah!' He let out a long sigh of relief, laughing at himself for having given way to fear. It was only an ordinary low flying aircraft passing overhead . . .' But no, it wasn't. Glancing behind him he saw the helicopter only a little way behind the car. Frowning, he accelerated even more, carefully watching the helicopter's movements in his driving mirror. There could be no doubt: the helicopter was following him.

Uttering a terrible oath in Spanish (Herr Gustaffson was a native of Chihuahua in Mexico), he pressed the accelerator right down to the floor, gripping the steering wheel so tightly that his knuckles whitened. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead; he muttered more Spanish curses, and his muscles tensed like the strings of a violin.

Herr Gustaffson was now driving like a madman. Every so often he glanced in the mirror, and what he saw produced a further string of Spanish oaths. He tried desperately to think what would be the best thing to do. Should he turn off the road suddenly into a narrow side road? Should he stop the car, leap out and make a dash for it? Should he . . . ? He passed his hand over his eyes. What was happening now? Was that a flash of lightning? But there was no thunder in the air; on the contrary, the sun was shining brightly. Was the strain of the last twenty six hours beginning to tell on him? No! There it was again. He was dazzled, blinded, he felt an intense pain in his eyes, and he had to slow down in order not to lose control of the car. There — again! He couldn't drive properly any more, he had to slow right down and shield his eyes from the scorching light. Then he couldn't see at all. He knew he had to stop — he had to.

'Look!' exclaimed Agaton Sax. 'Look what's happening. Why's he stopping?'

'Because I'm dazzling him with a reflector, of course,' replied Aunt Matilda, aiming another blinding flash directly into the eyes of the by now petrified Herr Gustaffson.

'Fantastic!' cried Agaton Sax. 'All I have to do is take the helicopter down, and we've got him.'

They saw Herr Gustaffson tumble out of his car and stagger across the road. He stood on the grass verge, reeling and covering his eyes with his arm in a vain attempt to protect them from the merciless shafts of light from Aunt Matilda's wickedly powerful reflector.

He had no choice but to give himself up to his old enemies, Agaton Sax and Inspector Lispington. He was handcuffed and led into the helicopter. Agaton Sax had a sudden longing to smoke his Sunday pipe, so he and Lispington stayed outside for a few moments, relaxing. After Agaton had lit his pipe and taken a few puffs at it, he said: 'Lispington, my friend, we've done well to catch Herr Gustaffson, but the job's not done yet. We still have to recover Andreas Kark's light machine. Andreas and I searched Herr Gustaffson's car and there's no sign of it. Somebody must have got away with it. This is indeed a sad day for the world.'

'We must make Herr Gustaffson confess,' Lispington said firmly. 'He's the one who stole it.'

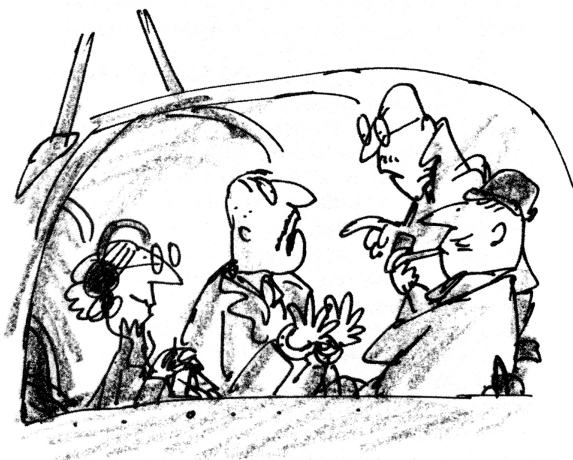
'Confess; it's an idea . . . ' replied Agaton Sax thoughtfully stroking his moustache with his right forefinger. 'Well, we can ask him, if you think it would do any good.'

They went back to the police helicopter. Andreas Kark was deep in thought, and Aunt Matilda, busily knitting, was keeping a vigilant eye on Herr Gustaffson, who, having got over his first shock, had resumed his usual air of cold impudence.

'Where have you hidden my grandfather clock?' demanded Lispington sternly.

Herr Gustaffson's only answer was a low chuckle. When

Lispington repeated his question, he answered: 'How can a smart cop like you ask such a stupid question?'



But Agaton Sax looked him straight in the eye. 'It's no good, Herr Gustaffson,' he said, 'the game is up. You're probably thinking that you'll get ten years or so, and then you'll be free to collect it from where you've hidden it, and so things aren't as bad as they look. But if that's what you're thinking, you're quite wrong. Because you see, I've already found the grandfather clock.'

'Liar!' exclaimed Herr Gustaffson. 'You can't have. You don't know where I've hidden it.'

'Of course I do,' said Agaton Sax coldly. 'It wasn't hard to find it. It was in the garage, where I had watched your every move. Unfortunately, somebody stole it later.'

Herr Gustaffson turned pale. He began to tremble, then to shake, and then he couldn't even speak.

Lispington took Agaton Sax aside and whispered: 'I don't understand. You told me a little while ago that you did *not* find my grandfather clock in the garage.'

'That's right,' Agaton Sax whispered back. 'I lied to Herr Gustaffson. The clock was not in the garage and it is not in his car either. One of the others must have pinched it. I lied to him, hoping that he would be able to tell us who he thought the thief might be.'

The disappearance of the grandfather clock and his light machine had been a terrible shock to Andreas Kark. He was so downcast by his dreadful loss that he had not been able to take any interest in the chase up to now. 'It will take at least two years to build a new light machine' he muttered sadly.

'Still' said Agaton Sax slowly, 'you may have to. I fear our chances of finding it are very small. It's a terrible blow to us all, but worse for you, of course, Andreas. This is probably the most disastrous failure in my whole career. But when I get home, I can at least put the whole problem to my computer, Clever Dick. He may come up with some useful ideas.'

It was indeed a solemn moment. Lispington was staring at his feet. He really felt truly sorry for this remarkable man, Andreas Kark, who had come to London in order to seek

protection against the two gangs who were now safely under lock and key — but who had lost his fantastic light machine, the very thing he had trusted his friends to keep safe.

Aunt Matilda had not been listening to what was being said, because when she was knitting she liked to get on with it, so instead of joining in, she had put on a pair of ear-phones, and enjoyed the last few minutes of a radio talk on sheep breeding. When it was over, she took off the ear-phones and put down her knitting with a little sigh.

'Well,' she said, 'I suppose I'd better try to get accommodation at a good hotel. Where are you staying, Agaton? "The Royal Arms"? Good. Will you please book a room for me as well?'

Lispington granted Aunt Matilda permission to land on the roof of Scotland Yard, and she went into Agaton Sax's helicopter. Just as she was closing the door before take-off, she turned to Lispington.

'Tell me, Inspector,' she asked, 'where is the lost property department at Scotland Yard?'

He told her, and Agaton Sax said with a little smile: 'You didn't drop your umbrella while you were flying over London, did you, Aunt Matilda?'

'Oh no, Agaton, I *never* lose things, you know that. I often *find* things, though. That's why I want the address of the lost property office.'

'And may I ask, Aunt Matilda, what you have found this time?'

'Oh, it's all very silly, really, but perhaps the object I've found may be of some value. In any case, I don't think it should have been lying where I found it, so I'll hand it in to lost property.'

Agaton Sax looked at his aunt, and said slowly: 'Tell me what you found, Aunt'

'Just an old grandfather clock that was in that garage I didn't think it ought to be there, so I took it with me. Actually, it's not a proper grandfather clock at all, because it's in two halves. I put them both in my helicopter, though I didn't feel very happy about the peculiar buzzing noises coming from inside.'

Now, at last, the identity of the second helicopter which had so puzzled everyone was made clear. It was Agaton Sax's personal machine, piloted by Aunt Matilda and they had seen it in the distance when they paid their second visit to the garage. Aunt Matilda had made a perfect landing there (having brought the necessary map with her from Byköping) and had hurried into the garage.

She arrived soon after Herr Gustaffson had deposited the grandfather clock there, thinking it would be safe while he took care of Mosca. Aunt Matilda saw the clock, but did not realize it contained Andreas Kark's light machine. She picked it up and put it in the helicopter (no mean feat for an old lady), so that when Agaton Sax and Andreas Kark reached the garage a few moments later, the clock had gone. Aunt Matilda, meanwhile, had taken off and flown to *Four Oaks*, using a detailed map she found in the garage. to locate Mosca's headquarters. There she had met Agaton Sax, but knowing nothing of Andreas Kark's light machine, she could see no reason for telling him about an old grandfather clock that she had found in the garage. There seemed to be more important things to say and to do at that particular moment.

A few hours later, Agaton Sax and Lispington shook hands congratulating each other on having brought to a successful conclusion one of the hardest cases in Scotland Yard's long and distinguished history. Everyone who should be was safely locked up and the light machine had been returned to its grateful owner. But there were still two small details which puzzled Agaton Sax. He turned to his friend.

'Lispington,' he said, 'there are just two things that still puzzle me. First, why is your grandfather clock in two pieces?'

'Oh dear me,' said Lispington with a little laugh, 'nothing could be easier to explain. You see, Agaton, this grandfather clock belonged originally not to my grandfather, which you might suppose, but to my great-great-great-great-grandfather. But now it's mine. It used to be an excellent clock, but a couple of years ago it began to go slow. It got slower-and slower, until at last it was losing an hour every twenty minutes.'

'What!' exclaimed Agaton Sax. 'It was losing an hour in 20 minutes. That's not possible.'

'Of course it's possible,' said Lispington irritably. 'it did.'

'But then it would be going backwards,' argued Agaton Sax.

'Exactly,' agreed Lispington. 'If I went to my office at 8.30 in the morning and did a day's work, I would get home for dinner at 4.30 the *same morning*. A bit early for dinner, eh? Four o'clock in the morning?'

'It would be,' Agaton Sax answered slowly, 'if. . . well, what did you . . .'

'What did I do about it?' interrupted Lispington. 'Well, I took the works out, carried them to my little smithy in the back garden and made a number of useful articles from the pieces: transistorized handcuffs, and so on.'

'And the wooden case?'

'Well, it occurred to me that the case, being made in two sections, would be the perfect place in which to keep secret papers. Naturally, I put *top-secret* papers in *top-section* of the case. Andreas Kark had the same idea at what better hiding place for his top-secret machine? Wouldn't you have done the same thing in his place, Agaton?'

'Yes, I suppose I would,' answered Agaton Sax thoughtfully, 'Right. Now, there's only one other thing to ask you. Tell me, Lispington, why didn't want me to call Scotland Yard when you were a prisoner in your house?'

Lispington looked at his friend in genuine surprise. 'But my dear Agaton,' he protested, 'nothing could have been more natural. Just imagine the headlines GANG HOLDS LISPINGTON OF SCOTLAND YARD HOSTAGE IN HIS OWN COAT CUPBOARD.'

'You're right, my dear chap,' said Agaton Sax, 'it would have been most embarrassing.'

'And think of the Government,' went on Lispington, 'they would have nagged for years about it. Locked up in my own coat cupboard!'



¹For further details about Andreas Kark, see *Agaton Sax and the League of Silent Exploders*.

² See: *Agaton Sax and the League of Silent Exploders*.